FILM QUARTERLY

Film Quarterly

FIFTY YEARS 50 1958–2008

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JIA ZHANG-KE'S *24 CITY*

GOMORRAH

DIGITAL IMAGING AND THE WAR ON TERROR

FILMS OF THE YEAR

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HEAVEN KNOWS WE'RE DIGITAL NOW

Tokyo Sonata (Kiyoshi Kurosawa)

In Kiyoshi Kurosawa's films, compulsive violence and fiendish visitations beset Tokyo. Ghosts stalk empty streets and derelict buildings. Even in *Bright Future*, which mostly avoids the supernatural, an executed young murderer comes back from the dead to witness the touching relationship between his father and the disturbed former flatmate whose life has unraveled since the sentence was carried out. The doomed age-gap friendship is as near as we ever get in Kurosawa's work to happy intimacy.

His films often explore alienation with the aid of gothic conspiracy theories. Spectral contagion is a preferred, if perplexing, explanation. "Suppose there is someone else who saw her in their dreams besides you," says the fidgety counselor in *Retribution*. "One more person, two more … and the number keeps growing." In *Pulse*, a student discovers an Internet-enabled phantom invasion: "Ghosts won't kill people. Because that would just make more ghosts . . . instead, they'll try to make people immortal by quietly trapping them in their own loneliness." The plague spreads in *Pulse*, which ends (as *Retribution* does too) with Armageddon.

This uncanny environment no doubt relates to Japanese socioeconomic stagnation, but Kurosawa tends to dismantle the allegory. His apparitions are never just figments or symbols—characters even lay hands on them in *Pulse*, *Doppelganger*, and *Retribution*. At the same time, living beings are becoming ethereal. "Nobody notices me," says one of *Retribution*'s killers. "I'll be forgotten in this world. People who are in front of me won't see me at all." Fantasy contaminates reality. Near the end of the film, Kurosawa seems to straighten things out, bracketing off delusion by showing a character embracing thin air where previously we had seen a revenant in his arms. However, everything is overturned again by one of the weirdest special-effects shots I have ever seen, involving a plummeting wraith and a bowl of earthquake-jolted water, before *Retribution* finishes with another deserted cityscape and a howl of torment from beyond the grave.

Tokyo Sonata seems to break from the eerie desolation. There are, by this filmmaker's standards, crowds: the fired administrator Ryuhei has to join long lines of the unemployed waiting for job advice and hand-out meals. And for once we see an intact family: Ryuhei, his wife Megumi, and their sons Takashi and Kenji. Yet the boys long for escape. Takashi manages to enlist in the U.S. army to fight in Iraq while Kenji, a prodigy, uses his lunch money for piano lessons.

Phantom pallor

Retribution. © 2006 Sakebi Film Partners. DVD: Lionsgate.

The film's first hour plays out as traditional melodrama (husband and wife each later declare they want to "start again," suggesting Ozu's *Tokyo Twilight* as one point of reference—see my notebook in the summer 2008 issue). Some critics have identified a new realism in Kurosawa's work, perhaps overlooking the element of reiteration. For *Tokyo Sonata* grows strange, beginning with what is explicitly a dream sequence. Takashi comes home. "I killed so many people," he says. "I killed too many." He sits and Megumi reaches to touch his shoulder—and then we cut to her waking up.

But has the dreaming ended? When Megumi goes on a forced road trip with an inept burglar (a cameo by Koji Yakusho, Kurosawa's regular lead actor), the erotic adventure seems to occur outside ordinary time, recalling the *Pierrot le Fou*-like escapade at the end of *Doppelganger*. The next morning, Megumi stands on a beach and an unnatural light shines on her. There are similar effects at the close of *Retribution*—we twice see the anguished specter's face bleach out, heightening a sense of the occult—so maybe we are still in a universe where, as that student in *Pulse* remarks, "ghosts and people are the same." According to such a reading, *Tokyo Sonata*'s lovely but disjointed final sequence starts to appear sorrowful and mysterious. It might even seem less

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like a conciliatory set piece than a moonlight death masque at one more end of the world.

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Time was when characters in stories looked to the skies for consolation—to contemplate eternity, sense divinity: "they thought that someone was looking down on them from the very heights of heaven, out of the deep blue sky where the stars were . . . and was watching over them" (Chekhov, "In the Ravine," translated by Ronald Wilks). Not so in Ridley Scott's *Body of Lies*. Leonardo DiCaprio's field agent stares upward and sees a flash of light reflected off an overflying spyplane's fuselage. In a reverse shot, we see his magnified face as it appears to the drone camera. Mysticism is no longer required in order to posit a power of celestial observation. Electronic signals are transmitted from the heavens to situation-room monitors, which are often also targeting devices (those who notice the metallic gleam are more likely to be blown up than consoled).

One of the most striking trends in recent cinema has been the abundance of movies that treat the "War on Terror." What Garrett Stewart demonstrates with reference to thirteen fiction films made since 2005 (there are at least as many documentaries besides) is the way digital video clips, "from high-altitude surveillance transmits to video diaries and cell-phone souvenirs," recur in them. These war films double as media studies, dealing with "a regime change in media as well as military control," a shift to a computerized system of "total visual transcription" exemplified by the shot in *Body of Lies*.

Except that this high-tech system is inefficient; the supposedly all-seeing apparatus produces unintelligible images. In *Rendition* and *Vantage Point*, amateur assassination footage is undistorted, but its significance eludes investigators. Elsewhere there is defacement: *Body of Lies* ends with the espionage feed cutting out, the screen a rasterized and abstract mess; thermal images of a killing ground in *Lions for Lambs* show dead soldiers as an indistinct blotch of pixels.

There is a crisis of imaging here. Central to *In the Valley of Elah* is a decomposed, initially unreadable cell-phone snapshot. Stewart dwells on the film's conclusion in which a 35mm flashback finally explains the photo. The sequence is an assertion, through montage, of an "inherent cinematographic power to figure an ethics of clarified vision"—and a presentation of digital video's failings not its apotheosis.

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Problems of intelligibility also arise in Errol Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure*, which features highly stylized reenactments of Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse in addition to self-

Eye robot

Body of Lies. © 2008 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. DVD: Warner Home Video (U.K.).

referential CGI trickery. For Caetlin Benson-Allott, this showmanship offers a crucial cautionary lesson, reminding viewers that digital representation is by definition tenuous, a computer-encoded simulation of reality. It is not automatically truthful, no matter how crystal-clear its high-definition detail. This does not mean that digital pictures are inevitably treacherous, but their code can be changed, the pixels reconfigured, the content cropped. In Benson-Allott's account of Morris's technique, it is important "not to mistake it for anything other than a version of events."

There are omissions and distortions. Like the recent American war films, *Standard Operating Procedure* unsettles the notion that digitization leads to obviously improved, more accurate visual records. It is not a downplaying of atrocity to claim that the Abu Ghraib photos cannot be taken entirely at face value. Although they delineate a manifestly horrifying dungeon world of kidnapped men hooded with sandbags, piled bodies, leering jailers, we know that there were worse things beyond the margins of these images.

The title of Rory Kennedy's documentary, *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, refers to people who mainly stayed outside the frame: incognito "handlers" as well as illicit detainees; invisible victims, unaccountable perpetrators—and, at a further remove, the redacted chain of command. The Abu Ghraib pictures attest to torture while providing alibis for the powerful. In this sense too, they are less comprehensive than they may seem, as secretive as they are revelatory.

Rob White

CINEMA FOR A NEW GRAND GAME

Che: Part One, Che: Part Two
(Steven Soderbergh)
***Quantum of Solace* (Marc Forster)**

The two parts of *Che* are doomed to be shown separately after the initial "Special Roadshow" opening, but they rightly comprise one movie. This is not to suggest that Soderbergh is experimenting with temporal aesthetics; he lives on Hollywood time, and at four hours plus, *Che* isn't visionary, it's long.

Necessarily so: it includes both a comedy and a tragedy, not commingled but in sequence. Comedy and tragedy as historical categories, that is; the first part ends not in marriage but in the overthrow of the Cuban military dictatorship, the marriage of a people with its own desires. The two hours of grinding failure that follow work because they are unalloyed, and the remorseless meanness on display accumulates the grandeur of its very lack of grandeur. *That's all it was, the Bolivian "revolution"*? It's just a few increasingly bedraggled rebels, barely enough to fill out a baseball team, stuck in a worsening situation. It ends, as all tragedies do, with the hero's death.

But it ends also with the death of an idea, that of a Bolivarian revolution uniting South America. The film's length is a gesture toward the historical *durée* of this idea, this hope, with its own trajectory distinct from anecdote and from any one man's life: a wide arc with some majesty even in its miserable cancellation.

The film throws its contemporaries into fine relief. It is among other things a terrific war movie; it leads one to realize how parlous is the spectacular, pious humanism of *Saving Private Ryan*, and similar fatigue-rippers. Soderbergh will never achieve Spielberg's epic blocking, and it's not clear he would want to; *Che* is anything but the hurtling of heroic bodies through space. It is made from the scraggly crack of substandard rifles, and extended coughing montages in the jungle. Such things are not used as props to establish courage under fire, or cues to character; the rifles and Che's asthma are part of the objective conditions, like terrain and economy. It's a movie that believes in objective conditions, or tries to.

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In its insistence on comedy and tragedy as something other than domestic categories of the individual—its refusal of subjective psychologizing—it is beyond exceptional in contemporary American cinema. Certainly the characters have lives; they are people. But they do what they do, noble and heinous and ambiguous, because they have an analysis. *Che* labors to give a sense of idealism as a human quality sprung from material circumstance, but not a deformation or delusion.

The film has one unfortunate cinematic diversion from this commitment: a flashback of Guevara posed solitary on the boat to Cuba, staring down the wale at the Castro brothers engaged in animated plotting. Always the outsider, the *extranjero* even at the center of the epic story. This five-second excursion into sentiment sharpens the film's point. We are not especially asked to like the characters (though Benicio del Toro can't resist being a bit beguiling; Demián Bichir as Castro is more rigorous). We are asked instead to believe they have thought about the human situation of politics and power, and chosen a course. They pursue it because they think it's right—not because some sibling died young or mommy didn't love them or any of the other exhausting banalities of biographical mechanics à la cineplex. In short, the film is long, but not tiresome.

Such a conception of character (it is perhaps Sartrean: the hero is simply the one who had developed the power to act) is the last thing we've been schooled to believe within American film culture, with its global reach. Extraordinary fidelity to an idea has become a discredited category. For villains it always masks malevolence and madness; for heroes it's an expression of personal brokenness, and will be made whole by love or forgiveness or really anything but serious politics.

And we like it this way. There's a history to this peculiar desire. The urge to exclude real politics from an account of human drives is the inevitable outcome when social structure itself wishes to disappear; this is the obsession of the bourgeoisie, which Barthes famously defined as "the social class which does not want to be named." But perhaps said class is getting less publicity-shy of late, if one is to judge by certain reactions to *Che*. *The New York Times* review asserts that it can't really be much of a film, by definition: "the trappings of bourgeois subjectivity . . . of course, are part of what make characters in movies interesting." And lack of same on

Revolutionaries in the revolution

Che: Part One. Photo: Laura Magruder. Courtesy IFC Films.

the part of Soderbergh's Guevara serves to "remove him from the realm of ordinary human sympathy."

This is an extraordinary theory of cinema in many regards, not the least because it suggests that, before the rise of the bourgeoisie, there were neither interesting nor sympathetic characters. In any regard, one is cheered that even the professionally hostile responses to the film are able to lay the relevant cards on the table.

One would guess (rightly, it turns out) that the critic in question (A. O. Scott) preferred *The Motorcycle Diaries*, Walter Salles's 2004 film that now serves as a sort of Part Zero to Soderbergh's opus. That earlier film shows young Ernesto approaching his future, episode by personal episode, as he and a friend travel the length of South America by motorcycle. It is Che before Che, before politics, and the film is more free to indulge in psychologizing.

But the question, quite evidently, is not which film is more bourgeois (indeed, we must be honest: both releases charged the full ticket price, and by that real measure, stand in identical relation to the marketplace). The most serious question, rather, is the most obvious one: thirty years after his death, why the hell did we suddenly need to make almost seven hours of Cinema Guevara, from his Argentine youth to his death in La Higuera, Bolivia?

This is the kind of mystery that requires James Bond.

The mystery begins with the peculiar narrative coincidences of *Quantum of Solace* and *Che*: each comes to a peak in central Bolivia, and features a scheme to overthrow said government. Following the Bond film's plot is no easy business. It's not that there's precious little, as with many actioners. There's loads, more than a reasonable film can bear, and it's edited to incoherence. Tracking it is a bit like watching the CGI battle scenes in *The Lord of the Rings* or, more charitably, like examining a large-format, digitally tweaked Andreas Gursky photograph. You can stare directly at it and still have the sense that you aren't really seeing what's going on—it's too complex, or perhaps your faculties of perception aren't yet developed enough to take it in.

One strand of narrative has Bond tracking the Quantum cabal in the wake of his lover's death at the end

of the previous installment, *Casino Royale*. Thus *Quantum of Solace* begins with this pursuit in Italy, and ends with it in Russia; these bookends are all action but for the final mild revelation about Bond's ex, his rapprochement with the home office, roll credits.

It's in the middle of the film that things get screwy. On the trail of Quantum, Bond runs afoul of one Dominic Greene, played by Mathieu Amalric. The French arthouse star, who looks a bit like a younger Roman Polanski, has a nice sideline in Hollywood bad guys, like his sinister ferret of an underworld plotter in *Munich*. His physical size is suggestive, as is the straitened scope of his villainy herein, which includes no nuclear clocks, orbital platforms, or threatened genocides. A sign of the times; every economy gets the supervillain it deserves.

The diminutive Gallic technocrat runs Greene Planet, an ecologically minded outfit. Under its green fig leaf the international combine schemes—in collusion with local strongman General Medrano—to acquire monopoly rights to the Bolivian water supply. Greene Planet will help Medrano to the presidency, and in return reap superprofits from already impoverished Bolivians on the water concession. Cue mad cackle. Bond saves the day, you will not be surprised to hear, with the help of one good-hearted CIA agent and your standard-issue Russo-South American supermodel–freedom fighter.

The plot is utterly vertiginous. This is not because of its ludicrousness but its familiarity, it being wholly plagiarized from the archives of reality—a fact apparently lost on every major national critic. *The New York Times* summarizes the plot as "Greene's diabolical scheme, itself never fully explained"; the *Los Angeles Times* settles for "a very standard-issue plot." The reliably sophisticated *New Yorker* dismisses it as "a squabble that feels both crazed and touchingly provincial."

None of them manage the word "Cochabamba."

This, it must be said, is rather dreadful dereliction of duty. It is on the order of watching a Bond movie set against the occupation of Tiananmen Square in Beijing by masses of students, and missing it entirely. In 1999, Cochabamba, the third largest city in Bolivia, privatized its water supply—as a condition of receiving a loan continuation from the World Bank. The Aguas del Tunari consortium, as it was called, was an international combine including a couple of local corporations but led by International Water Ltd, a subsidiary of Bechtel Corporation. Their pricing meant that the Bolivians were paying in some cases a quarter of their income for water.

Public response, in the form of occupations, blockades, and a general strike, was massive; repression followed, including military action against civilians, and a government-declared state of siege. The protest spread throughout the nation; midway through 2000, the "Bolivian Water Wars" ended with the eviction of the consortium and, shortly, the fall of the government itself. One of the occupation leaders, congressman and coca grower Evo Morales of the Movement for Socialism, would become the first indigenous head of state since the Spanish conquest five centuries earlier.

This is one of the great political stories of our time. It cannot be entirely surprising that it would resurface in Hollywood, which never met some prefab content it didn't like (though the reliably symptomatic Bond series has seldom tarried so closely with the topical). It would be easy to argue that the film preserves the story exactly so as to rewrite it, to rescue it for the ideological doxa of Hollywood; the screenplay is something like a primer in recuperation.

Rapacious capitalism gets its indictment only because it appears in inverted form: Bechtel returns as Greene Planet, ecopolitics merging with corporate cynicism. This is a moral missing from the actual history but, well, good ideals must always mask bad motives. So say the rules. In the film, the water plot is a shadowy conspiracy entwined with a military coup, pointedly impossible to credit—rather than the open corporate deal with the government that no one bothered to conceal. And inevitably, the communal insurrection of lived history is nowhere to be found. The fiendish plot must instead be foiled by our lone hero, who is also a representative of the global policing system, and who further is driven not by commitments but by personal demons. Though Cochabamba is just down the road from La Higuera, *Quantum of Solace*, one might say, is the anti-*Che*.

But *Quantum of Solace* still comes closer to telling the Bolivian story than the critics are able to address, or notice. If it stands that story on its head, we aren't surprised: per Marx, "in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura." Once the story is set on its feet, it instantly becomes the key which will unlock the mystery of all this Che revivalism. Salles and *Solace* and Soderbergh stand as a single notion: not one about the lost and romanticized Bolivarian revolution of the 1950s and 60s, but a present fact. They index, in their cynicism and idealism and mainly in their sheer *insistence*, an anxiety and a hope about contemporary geopolitics: a cinema for the new Grand Game of the Global South.

The Cochabamba story is itself a moment in a larger motion: in the last decade, the southern cone has turned left in a way without historical precedent. It is a variegated Left that includes neoliberal rejection, socialist movements and indigenous struggles, old and new populisms, tentative

Geopolitics is destiny

Quantum of Solace. © 2008 Danjaq LLC, United Artists Corporation, Columbia Pictures Industries Inc.

coalitions. But it includes Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Uruguay, Paraguay, Nicaragua, Cuba; here in the public imagination of the imperial core, we give this vast and complicated wave the rather simple name of "Hugo Chavez," and pretend it is confined to Venezuela, an isolated instance.

Perhaps this is right. It is not clear by any means that these varied political tides will flow together. But it's not clear they won't. Just as each global empire has been more expansive than the last, so too the major revolutions grow in scope. And they tend to happen at some distance, in moments of imperial transfer, when the great powers lose their ability to magnetize the globe to their own interests. Consider the nation-sized French revolution, in the moment that the United Provinces gave way to the British Empire. Or the Soviet revolution with its subcontinental scope, transpiring off to the side of the shift from British to U.S. hegemony.

By this logic, Che Guevara's Bolivarian revolution was too early. This may be exactly what the grim hours that conclude *Che* mean to point up: the miserable debacle is not bad fortune or bad strategy but proof that objective conditions, in the largest sense, weren't right. Yet it is plain enough that we are in such a moment of transfer now; it would be reasonable to inspect the horizon for a truly continental swell. And this, in some strange way, seems to be a task that the movie industry has set for itself—behind its own back as usual, "behind the back of consciousness itself" (as Hegel had it, thinking perhaps of those *Quantum of Solace* reviews). These displacements and distortions and blind spots are all par for the course; such is the camera obscura of Hollywood. Pointing out its operation is no achievement. But it is worth notice indeed what the spectacle business has gotten anxious about, and started spectacularizing full force.

All of which reminds us that what supposedly removes Che from human sympathy is exactly what makes Hollywood so compelling, so hard to look away from and so hard to see. "Character is destiny" is a very old saying, a folk wisdom beloved despite the increasingly evident contradiction: it seals the wellspring of what happens hermetically within the individual, even as it insists fatalistically that making our own history is out of our hands. But if one imagines Hollywood to be a single character, the fate of this image-making machinery—what gets made, and when, and how it unreels—is evidently just as responsive to geopolitics, to the impress of objective conditions. Certainly they return deformed, misshapen, unsayable: this is not the charm of "bourgeois subjectivity," but simply its form of self-defense.

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REVISITING THE PAST

***Of Time and the City* (Terence Davies)**
***Katyn* (Andrzej Wajda)**

One's reactions to films can involve a complex of relations to other films seen, other people's opinions, and one's own experience. But the puzzle of my response to *Of Time and the City* is painfully simple. I greatly admired the early Terence Davies films based on his experiences of growing up in Liverpool, but because that personal touch was absent from *Neon City* and *The House of Mirth* I respected rather than admired those films. Now, at last, he's back to Liverpool with *Of Time and the City*, which arrived from England with rave reviews. And yet, with the exception of its admirably chosen music and a few good touches, I found it abominably grating.

One immediate mistake is Davies's own recorded commentary. No trace of Scouse speech here, only an unctuous Oxford accent (he hasn't lived in Liverpool in years). There is continual snideness in what he says as he attacks Catholicism (which God knows I have no great urge to defend) for rejecting his sexual orientation, and also as he brushes aside the Beatles and gives the back of his hand to the Queen. When he does turn away from anger it is usually toward regret, for example by quoting Chekhov's "The golden moments pass and leave no trace." Golden moments are certainly in short supply here.

There is a lot of visual repetition, even of the Catholic cathedral, but most assiduously of the old working-class row houses that used to cover much of the city. While many of the shots include people who live there, they hardly ever convey any sense of what those people are like. There is no close contact with them, no extended hearing of what they have to say. They are reduced to stock figures in an all-purpose setting. But at least Davies is right in showing that the cold unneighborly high-rises that have replaced the row houses are much worse.

Eighty percent of the visuals in the film come from library sources and merely illustrate Liverpool rather than have any direct contact with Davies's own experience of the city. They do include some impressive shots, such as an immense soccer crowd viewed as if from the air and huge ferries crossing the River Mersey that separates Liverpool from its western neighbors. But those visuals are far outnumbered by shot after shot of old-time working-class streets.

There are nevertheless one or two scenes that carry a touch of mystery and surprise, like a young man staring out intensely (not at the camera) from beside a front door, his lower face hidden by a privet hedge. But otherwise the film lacks the intense engagement of a former citizen with his native city. It seems more like a resentful man just spitting on his background.

I hope Davies can make a better film soon.

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At the end of World War II the British army created a Polish Resettlement Corps, which trained teenage refugees from Soviet-controlled Poland for a military career in Britain. Having recently been claimed by the British Army myself, I was for a time assigned to work with the PRC. I chatted frequently with the Polish officers in charge of the teenagers, but never heard any mention of the Katyn massacre. It was not something to be chatted about, especially by people who had left a native land eaten up in turn by two predatory neighbors. And of course, they were now in a country that had been an ally but could do nothing to save them and, what's more, had become an ally of one of the predators.

By coincidence, I was later assigned to a base where many German POWs were still working. Their hometowns were in what was now East Germany and they were reluctant to return to a Soviet-dominated area. A pleasant former corporal worked as my part-time assistant. One day he showed me a photograph of himself back in his army days. His face wore the grim expression familiar from pictures of Hitler's soldiers.

For FDR and Churchill, Stalin was an embarrassment and a savior. Without Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union the war would have been far tougher for the western Allies. So the Katyn massacre could not be an open issue for the western powers. I had long known that intellectually, but it wasn't until seeing Andrzej Wajda's *Katyn* that I fully realized not just the horror of the slaughter, but also the near-helplessness of the Polish people caught between two dictatorial forces without any hope of outside support.

Britain, as close as it was to the European mainland, never found itself in such a squeeze. After the fall of France it seemed likely that Germany would launch a cross-Channel invasion, but if that had happened there would have been no

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Soviet tanks rumbling down competitively through Scotland. Even well-made films of an imagined invasion, such as the Kevin Brownlow–Andrew Mollo *It Happened Here* (1964) and Bergman's disturbing but totally imaginary *Shame* (1968), could not match the real darkness of *Katyn*. Although the film has flaws they do not undermine its overall power.

The film is in color, but my mind's eye can see color only in the opening sequence, on a sunlit bridge where Poles fleeing from the Germans meet other Poles fleeing from the Red Army. (The Germans had started their invasion September 1, 1939; the Soviets surged in September 17.) After that, the color is muted everywhere: no bright blossoms, pretty dresses, cheerful paintings, or tempting foods.

For Anna, who is going east across the bridge with her small daughter Niki, her intent is to see her officer husband Andrzej and persuade him to return home. He and his fellow officers are already under the seemingly casual supervision of the Soviet forces, but he refuses to leave his fellows.

From now on we see Andrzej only in various kinds of spartan transportation and, for the most part, in a large, crowded, and apparently windowless warehouse, where the leading Polish general addresses the officers from time to time with urgings of patience and hope.

Andrzej is keeping a record of events and rumors in a thick diary, but other officers have no such defense against boredom and unease. At one point the camera itself seems to convey the men's frustration as it dollies back a short way as if to a wall, cranes up as if to the ceiling, and moves forward, looking down, until stopped as if by another wall. (That is the only showy camera movement I noticed in the whole film, but it makes its point.)

Meanwhile the film has jumped to the home of Andrzej's parents in Kraków, where the Nazis have already taken control. (They and the Soviets divided Poland between them, with Kraków in the east falling into the Nazi zone.) Andrzej's father, a professor at the university, is summoned along with other staff members to a "meeting" with the German SS. The father is hopeful that the university will be allowed to continue, but the SS officer in charge immediately blasts any such hope. Savagely cutting off any attempt to speak by the staff he denounces the university and has the staff seized for delivery to a concentration camp.

Now we're returned to Anna, who is trying unsuccessfully to get permission for her and Niki to return to Kraków. In what may be an accidental but nonetheless effective hint of the increasing sense of insecurity, I had no idea where this scene takes place or whether it's in the Nazi or Soviet zone. Also unclear is the location of Anna's and Niki's next crucial sequence, in which they're staying with Anna's sister, though here the Soviets are clearly in charge. A Major Popov offers to protect Anna and Niki from a Soviet round-up by marrying her, saying that her husband would be dead by now, but she declines. He nevertheless hides her when the round-up arrives and then warns her to move on. (I still can't quite decide whether Popov, the only Soviet Russian who appears as a human being, fits in or is too obtrusive.)

In another aptly disorienting leap it is 1940, and Anna and Niki are now in Kraków. They are staying with Andrzej's mother, who has received some letters from her imprisoned husband (the former professor). Now comes an official notice that he has died of illness.

At this point time continues to move forward in the Polish scenes while it remains in 1940–41 with the imprisoned Polish soldiers in the Soviet Union—a split that is not as confusing as it may sound. (It also reflects the delay between the massacre and its full discovery, which was particularly long for Wajda's own family: his father was a victim who had been registered under the wrong name.)

Now the year turns to 1943 in Kraków, where the Nazis are still in power. Loudspeakers on the street announce the names of Polish soldiers who have died. Anna's mother-in-law arrives home to report with relief that Andrzej is not on the list, which irritates Anna (hinting both at her distrust of Nazi announcements and at the tensions under which they are living). In another part of the city, the wife of the captured general is summoned to the office of a Nazi official, who "regretfully" announces the discovery of the Katyn massacre and her husband's death. She says nothing, even after he insists she should say something, so she's hustled into a screening room and shown a film of the disinterred bodies, with emphasis on bullet holes in the skulls. (This is a print of the original Nazi film.) She's then allowed to stagger out.

The Nazis don't remain for long. In mid-January 1943 Soviet forces take possession of Kraków. As Anna's mother-in-law watches the captured German forces being marched out her face is blank, deftly conveying the empty feeling of being transferred from one unwanted ruler to another. More twisted feelings are yet to come. A former servant of the general's widow, well-dressed and conveyed by car because she's working for the Soviets, arrives to deliver the general's sword. Jerzy, Anna's cousin, also working for the Soviets, comes to visit Anna when she is out, and he tells Niki that her father has been moved to another camp. He leaves to fetch some meat for them just as Anna is returning, and as she presses him about her husband he tells her the truth: Andrzej is dead. Anna goes to tell her mother-in-law and then collapses.

At this point the film loses some of its continual pressure as it slips into three disconnected incidents. The first starts

Dark traces of history

Katyn. © 2007 Akson Studio/Telewizja Polska S.A./Telekomunikacja Polska S.A. DVD: ITI Home Video (Poland).

well but ends implausibly, the second is stunning but out of key, and the third takes too long to make the point that even the Catholic Church dare not risk offending the Soviets.

First, at night, a Red Army truck in a city square is showing a film about Katyn as a German massacre. The general's widow approaches the operator and starts to argue. Jerzy happens to be walking by and leads her away. At a safe distance he tells her that he *says* the same as the film but he *thinks* differently. She spurns him as a coward and walks away. Jerzy then goes into a bar and starts talking loudly about what the Soviets did at Katyn. When he walks out he is shot dead by someone unseen.

Second, Anna is working for a photographer when her nephew Tadzio arrives in Kraków looking for a job, and she arranges an interview with her boss. Although Tadzio refuses to sign a form blaming the Germans for Katyn, it seems that he will be accepted anyway. But after leaving he tears down a pro-Soviet notice and is pursued by the police. He runs around a corner and asks a young woman where he can hide. She leads him up to a rooftop where they watch his pursuers giving up the chase. They come down near a movie theater and make a date to go there together later. But after they part, a policeman spots Tadzio again. He goes on the run but is hit by a police car and killed.

Third, a young woman named Agnieska, whose brother died at Katyn, has ordered a headstone that tells the truth of his death. The local priest refuses to accept it. When she hires two men to trundle it to the graveyard she is arrested and the headstone broken.

Now the film regains its momentum. An old woman brings Andrzej's soiled and battered diary to Anna and Nika, saying she got it from someone who shot himself. Cut to what is now openly a flashback: Andrzej with other officers on a train near Smolensk. The train stops at a place called Gnezdovo and the Polish officers are transferred to black vans. The vans stop in front of a building. The general is led into a darkish room with a large picture of Stalin on the wall and is immediately shot in the back of the head. His body is carried out (a brief close-up of the carrier's boot stomping in a puddle of blood) and deposited onto a wagon.

The other officers are still waiting in the vans, and Andrzej is still writing in his diary, with no sign that they suspect what is about to happen. But now in a close shot the diary reverts to its "present" soiled condition, its pages flicking over, and next the officers are being rapidly disposed of, each shot once in the back of the head, some of them at the edge of the vast "grave" so that they fall directly into it, some uttering a few words of the Lord's Prayer in the seconds they have left. For one, the pistol fails to fire, and the couple of extra seconds of life he has before the reloading only add to the horror. Then a Soviet soldier walks along the corpses and sticks a bayonet into a body that may still be alive, while bulldozers start to cover the bodies with earth. Finally the soundtrack offers a soft requiem chant; fade to black . . .

The term "Katyn massacre" came to include other mass killings that took place at several nearby locations, involving many other prisoners of war from the area, and estimates of the total number killed range up to 22,000. *Katyn* focuses on the first group of 8000 POWs. The film's killing sequence, lengthy as it may seem, probably involves fewer than fifty of those victims. It is performed with such rapid efficiency that even after a second viewing I can't say whether Andrzej's death does or doesn't appear on-screen. I assume it doesn't, however, since he as the diarist represents the future discovery of what really happened, and you can't kill a symbol.

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Wajda was eighty when *Katyn* was released in Poland over two years ago. It's the first film of his I've seen since *Man of Iron* (1981), in large part because his later films had few if any showings over here. At the same time I had become somewhat disappointed with his previous films, such as *The Orchestra Conductor* (1980), in which a miscast John Gielgud plays a self-exiled Pole returning home to conduct a special performance.

Wajda had made his reputation with three early films—*A Generation* (1954), *Kanal* (1956), and *Ashes and Diamonds* (1959)—which dealt with Warsaw toward the end of World War II, when Polish partisans were fighting the Nazis. Working in Communist Poland, Wajda could not reveal in *Kanal* that the Soviet army deliberately stopped outside Warsaw until the partisans were crushed, but the film's sympathies are clearly with the latter. And he even managed to present the anti-Soviet activists in *Ashes and Diamonds* as rather likable human beings.

By 1981 the rise of Solidarność—celebrated in Wajda's *Man of Iron*—was bringing Communist rule to an end. It's possible (but sheer guesswork on my part) that Wajda then missed the challenge of eluding the strictures of Communist censorship. In any case, *Katyn* presented him with a fierce challenge of its own: to create a film lasting no more than two hours (plus one minute) that deals vividly with the clash of two dictatorships, the plight of the invaded people under their control, and the revelation of a brutal massacre.

Thanks to the staff at Film Forum for extra help with *Katyn* viewings.

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HOWLS FOR GUY DEBORD

On March 1, the Film Society of Lincoln Center screened a retrospective of Guy Debord's films at New York's Walter Reade Theater, the first time that most had been officially shown in this country.

The films included *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (*Howls for Sade*), Debord's first feature. *Hurlements* consists exclusively of a blank white screen (while the voices of Debord and his Lettrist comrades intone an intentionally disjointed script) interspersed with a black screen (during which the soundtrack is silent). The film famously ends with twenty-four minutes of complete darkness and silence.

In 1952 the film was a provocation. Its first Paris screening was shut down after twenty minutes, the second caused a furious audience to riot. (Debord and partner Michèle Bernstein were in the cinema balcony with bags of flour to dump on people below; Bernstein later recalled that they themselves probably left before the end, seeing no reason to stick around during the final period of black.) A London presentation several years later was nearly as raucous. Angry audience members leaving the first screening begged those waiting for a second showing to leave, creating an atmosphere so charged that the waiting audience—believing anything causing such outrage *must* be worth seeing—became even more desperate to get in.

Hurlements is one of those films more frequently described than experienced. There seemed to me good reasons for this, quite aside from the fact that the film was impossible to see for many years. The English translation of the script can be easily found. Once one has read the script and "got" the film's basic concept, what more could there be? And how can one recreate a scandal when the whole story is already known? Why replay a role that an audience had already played fifty years earlier? I thought the film would be essentially a gimmick, and probably unwatchable (I assumed I would go out to the lobby during the final twenty-four minutes of black). But this was likely the only opportunity I would ever have to see *Hurlements* projected with a large audience. I wondered what might happen.

The film starts with several minutes of text, spoken over a white screen. There's a brief summary of essential dates in film history, including those of Debord's birth and the premiere of *Hurlements*, then a short disclaimer: "Just as the projection was about to begin, Guy-Ernest Debord was supposed to step onto the stage and make a few introductory remarks. Had he done so, he would simply have said: 'There is no film. Cinema is dead. No more films are possible. If you wish, we can move on to a discussion.'" Then follow several fragmentary statements, including "Happiness is a new idea in Europe" (Saint-Just) and, pointing forwards toward ideas that would be central to Debord's later activity with the Situationist International, "The art of the future will be the overthrow of situations, or nothing."

When the screen suddenly goes black and silent, it creates a palpable shock. There is a very strong sense that Debord is saying, "Here's what I think, now it's your turn to respond." At a minimum, to formulate a mental response. And there is a very strong pull to respond publicly, out loud. I started wondering whether I should say something during the twenty-four-minute silence at the end, perhaps something like, "Here's some space in which we have a chance to talk. Maybe we could talk about how we came to be here?"

The first silence doesn't last very long, and is followed by some more spoken text. But after a while, the silences grow to several minutes. In addition to questioning my own responses and whether I should speak out, I start becoming hyperaware of all the sounds in the auditorium: the sixty-cycle hum from the sound system, people's rustlings, the several conversations which have quietly started up in different parts of the theater (two people on the front left side are particularly loud). The occasional scratch or splice in the black leader has a shocking effect.

This hyperawareness is quite fascinating, but as I'm becoming absorbed by it someone who seems to be associated with the theater (the manager?) walks over to the two people near the front and loudly tells them to be quiet. They say something back, and the manager starts saying something about this not being the place to talk. One of the two people loudly suggests an anatomical impossibility. The manager says that if people won't be quiet he'll call theater security and have them taken out. At this point, a man sitting on the other side of the theater calls out, "Do you really think an attitude of reverential silence is the best way to approach this film?" I call out, "The film creates a situation. Of course we should react to it!"

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There's relative quiet for a while, then someone says something and a woman loudly tells him to be quiet, to go outside if he wants to talk. I call out that I'd like to make a different proposal, that we all talk about what brought us to this theater and why we're interested in Guy Debord. No one responds to this. Trying a different tack, I suggest that we should all hold our breath and see who lasts longest. Silence. A minute later a security guard appears standing at the right side of the auditorium.

There are more bits of text, increasingly fragmented, and more and longer blacks. After ten minutes or so the security guard, obviously bored out of his mind, walks out behind the stairs and a moment later there's a ray of light as the entrance door opens and closes. I call out that the police have left the auditorium. General approval.

But that's pretty much it. I'm feeling a lot of adrenaline and really working hard to figure out how to spark some kind of participation. I'm wishing I'd looked at the script before coming, because I don't remember what the last line of text is, and I don't want to start something only to have a white screen and some more of Debord's text come along. I also can't remember the film's exact length, so my efforts to time it aren't helpful.

Finally, we're at roughly the sixty-minute mark, and it's been black for several minutes. I call out, "Doesn't *anyone* have something they want to say?!" General laughter, and someone calls out, "Why don't you say something?" I say that I've already spoken several times; this should be a chance for everyone to speak. A man near the center aisle calls out, "Why don't we sing a song?" There's no initial response, so I call out, "What do you want to sing?" No real response, so I ask, "What's your favorite song?" He has some trouble with this question, and he (or someone else) eventually suggests the "Internationale." But no one seems to know the words. He then suggests "Born in the USA"; some other people object, but others are Springsteen fans so we all sing the chorus. No one seems to know any verses, however. There's a pause. The only song I can think of is the final verse from "Solidarity Forever," so I offer to sing it. No one objects, so I sing: "In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold, / Greater than the might of armies, magnified a thousand-fold. / We can bring to life a new world from the ashes of the old / For the union makes us strong / Solidarity forever . . ."—adding after the end, "but we all know how Debord felt about unions." Someone says that it takes nerve to sing out loud, and I reply, "No, it's easy to do stuff in the dark!"

The man in the aisle asks if he can sing a Spanish song. He does so, it's a quiet, rather moving song. When he's finished, I ask him to translate. He says he can't, pauses, then says it's a song about childhood, a lullaby, a song about how a child sees various things. Things that only make sense when you're a child.

At this point, a security guard and I think another person from the theater (it's so dark it's almost impossible to see) go up to him and tell him he has to leave. Immediate indignation from the rest of the audience. I yell that we've all been talking, it's not fair to focus on one person. Someone else says, "If he's thrown out we'll all walk out!" I call out, "What is the official Film Society of Lincoln Center position on how people should respond to this film?!" Someone else suggests we take a vote on whether the person should be ejected; another yells "Should he be ejected?" and lots of people answer "No!" The person who suggested the vote says, "See? We don't want him ejected," but others object saying we need a fair vote, on principle there should be an opportunity for people to vote "yes." So we vote again, but no one votes "yes." Meanwhile, the theater people have been negotiating, and they offer that the man can stay as long as he talks more quietly. He offers to sing something quiet, maybe "Killing Me Softly"? I call out "NO! If he's going to sing that he *should* be thrown out!" General laughter.

Shortly thereafter, there's a brief blink and I notice that the film is apparently over (it's hard to tell, since the screen was black both before and after). Someone asks, "What's going to happen now?" A man up front says, "They're going to play the film again!" Which was the funniest comment of the evening.

Afterwards, on the way out of the theater, I passed a young couple that had been sitting in back of me during the screening. We fell to talking, and the man said it was the most amazing experience he'd ever had at a film, he'd had no idea what was going to happen and how he should react, he was amazed how difficult it was mentally to challenge the convention that one shouldn't talk in a movie theater, but he had strongly felt that he should *do* something.

Hurlements is usually described as alienating, but that wasn't its effect at all. It played as a challenge to the audience to involve themselves; the result was a warm pulling in, not a cold pushing away. I felt intoxicated after leaving the theater, and realized that, damn it, Debord succeeded. He had created a situation, one that was still potent fifty-seven years later.

ZACK WINESTINE has directed two feature films, *States of Control* (1997) and *Caravan/Prague* (2007), and several shorts, including *On Some Consequences of a Passage by Guy Debord* (1983). He is currently writing a book about theories of passionate moments.

THE EARRINGS OF MADAME DE . . .

The Earrings of Madame de . . . (or just *Madame de . . .*, the original French and U.K. title by which I have always known it) was Max Ophuls's penultimate film, preceding the difficult experience of *Lola Montes* (1955) and his untimely death at the age of fifty-five in 1957. Into it, as though he somehow sensed that his career was about to end, he collected so many of the themes that had preoccupied him over the previous two decades, reaching back to his first major production, *Liebelei* (1933), that the film feels almost like an Ophuls compendium. For this display of repetition and return, he chose a story that is actually about repetition and return, drawing attention to the way in which repetition is a theme in many of his films (as critics have pointed out). Scenes at railway stations or the opera recur in a number of the films, as do camera positions, gestures, words, and phrases. Such recapitulations give his films a rhythmic beat, which is accentuated by the trademark mobile camera, a key stylistic connection in his cinema. After Ophuls returned from Hollywood to France in 1950, repetition seemed to become the director's dominant concern—from *La Ronde* in 1950 (which traces a circular chain of ten sexual encounters), to *Lola Montes* (in which the circular shape of the circus tent encompasses the repeated tableaux that frame the eponymous woman's rise and fall). It is perhaps no wonder that Ophuls declared that it was mainly the circulation of the earrings that interested him in the *Madame de . . .* novella by Louise de Vilmorin. Nevertheless, he gave the characters and their dilemmas, as he translated them into cinema, great psychological poignancy and complexity.

Comtesse Louise (Danielle Darrieux) is a beautiful woman of the belle époque, married to the charming and sophisticated General André (Charles Boyer). At the very beginning of the film, in a scene shot in a single elegant, extended take, Louise examines her jewels and her valuable possessions to find something she can sell, without her husband's knowledge, to pay off some debts she has accumulated. Among the excellent Criterion DVD extras is a translation of costume designer Alexander Annenkov's reminiscences about working on the film. He recalls that Ophuls told Darrieux that her character is essentially empty, a woman without culture whose frivolous life revolves around pleasure. Indeed *Madame de . . .* starts out with Louise's foolishness: in choosing to sell the diamond earrings given her by André the day after their wedding, she undervalues this emblem of her own sexual surrender, assessing the earrings simply in terms of monetary rather than symbolic exchange. Thus the earrings embark on their journey: the jeweller (Jean Debucourt), in spite of his promise of secrecy to Louise, informs her husband, who buys them back and then gives them to his mistress, Lola (Lia Di Leo), as a parting present when she leaves Paris. Louise pretends that the earrings are lost and the general indulges her deception. (Ophuls's direction and Boyer's performance complicate the figure of the general: his sympathy for Louise humanizes him just as her later fetishization of the earrings dehumanizes her.) The earrings change hands again after Lola sells them in Constantinople and they are bought by Fabrizio Donati (Vittorio De Sica). In Paris, where he is posted as Italian ambassador, he and Louise are brought together: twice they meet fleetingly and by chance, only to find that their social circle (including the general) has decided that they are "made for each other," with the implicit hint that Louise's heartless coquetry has found its male equivalent in the ambassador. Although they begin a flirtation in this spirit, it develops into a grand passion. When their relationship is about to become a sexual affair, Donati gives Louise the earrings as a secret token of their love.

With this triangle, Ophuls repeats a configuration that he had first used in *Liebelei* and returned to in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), in each case revising aspects of the original stories in order to dramatize the opposition between the husband and the wife's lover. Just as he gave the husband in both previous films highly rigid, aristocratic, and military attributes, so here again in *Madame de . . .* he transforms the "monsieur" of the novella into a general. (A fascinating extra on the DVD is a filmed interview with Vilmorin, in which she denounces the changes made to her story: from the elevation of the husband, to the relocation of the story historically to the belle époque, to the duel with which the film ends.) Ophuls's version of *Madame de . . .* confirms that, above and beyond stories of romantic passion, he was interested in creating opposing iconographies of masculinity: on the one hand, a "feminized" man, a man who loves love, a "womanizer"; on the other hand, a husband who personifies the "law," a representative of military and aristocratic "order." Whereas the lover introduces the drive of desire into the

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Rival masculinities: soldier and seducer

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story, the husband interrupts it with the drive of death. The conflict of opposing masculinities is ultimately played out off-screen in the duel, but it gets its fullest treatment in the scene in which the general confronts the ambassador with a series of insults that cannot but lead to a duel. Donati lounges in a chair, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, while the general stands fully erect in his uniform and military accoutrements. Ultimately, the duel returns the story to the world of men; Louise and her love are marginalized, a process which is prefigured by Louise's response to the amazing reappearance of the earrings. Entranced by what seems to her to be a manifestation of providence or fate, Louise lies to both men in order to be able to wear the jewels in public. She tells André she has found the earrings among her clothes; she explains to Donati that she has convinced her husband that they are the legacy of an obscure relative.

Now the earrings take on their full allegorical force: emblems of chance mistaken for destiny, they symbolize differences between male and female viewpoints, male coercion of female sexuality, inequalities in gendered power relations. Louise wants to celebrate sexual passion in the present and the future by wearing the earrings, but their prior connection to marriage and social propriety punitively and violently reasserts itself. When Louise appears at a ball wearing the diamond hearts, the general simply takes them from her and explains their origin to Donati ("a gift the day after our marriage"). Boyer and De Sica play the scene with exquisite subtlety and economy. The general's revelation of his full knowledge of the earrings opens with a one-word question: "Constantinople?" Donati is trapped. He has to acknowledge with complete impassivity that the token of his passion for Louise has already signified her sexual surrender to her hus-

band. With immediate, perfect diplomacy and compliance, he ends the relationship and takes the earrings back to the jeweller. After the earrings change hands again, Louise is devastated. Obsessed with reclaiming them, she sells all her remaining valuables to buy them back. It is then that the general, exasperated, challenges Donati. Louise dedicates the earrings to her favorite saint and, arriving at a distance from the duel, hears a gunshot and then exclaims: "Why no second shot?"

If the military man represents bodily rigidity, the point of halt, the stop of death that will bring a story to its end, the "womanizer" brings motion to the story through his ability to create emotion. In *Madame de . . .* , Ophuls frames abstract and structural problems: the relation of desire to narrative drive, or death to narrative's termination, and these problems cannot be detached from the movement of the cinema itself, the destiny of the motion-picture machine, in which the narrative function of emotion is to enable the film to blossom into sequences of pure cinematic movement. The central set piece of the film consists of a slow montage across a series of balls in which Louise and Donati's relationship moves from casual flirtation to passion. This blossoming of bodily and

Intertextual dance

Top right: *Letter from an Unknown Woman.* A Rampart Production © 1948 BBC. DVD: Second Sight (U.K.). Others: *The Earrings of Madame de . . .* © 1953 Gaumont-Rizzoli Films. DVD: Criterion Collection.

cinematic movement slows down the forward movement of the narrative, suggesting that the ecstasy of love involves slowing and delaying time. The image of dance is caught by mirrors breaking up the horizontal gliding of the camera with multiple, fragmented images. A nonlinear time emerges around the succession of waltzes, one in which movement is of the essence—but a free-flowing, purposeless circling of both camera and dancers, separate from forward movement toward "the end." From this perspective, the guardian of the law also acts as a guardian of narrative development, bringing both its delay and irrational passion back onto a linear path, the end of which will be figured literally and metaphorically by the stop of death.

Ophuls was a modernist. Although he loved the kind of cinema, these melodramas of romantic failure, through which he earned his living and found creative expression, evidence exists across his films that he always looked ironically both on the illusion of love and the cinema illusion. Several theorists have commented on the significance of the love scene in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* that takes place in a little fairground train in which panorama scenes are mechanically presented outside the window. Ophuls shows how the old man creates the illusion with a bicycle-powered device. The earlier scene returns obliquely in the ballroom montage in *Madame de . . .* as mirrors occasionally break the screen into a horizontal panel of dancing couples, and particularly as large paintings are incorporated into the dance sequence, from which Louise and Donati emerge in a slow dissolve. At this point a strange couple intrude into the romantic scene: "the admiral and his wife," elderly and somewhat grotesquely dressed for a masquerade, dance jerkily in front of the camera. While they satirize the romantic couple, stripped of glamor and the illusory trappings of love, their movements are also a reminder of the mechanics of the cinema—whose figures are simply animated still frames that give an impression of movement. As the dancing figures repeat the pattern of the waltz, shades of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* return, if only for a moment, to haunt another ambivalent Ophulsian scene.

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DVD DATA *The Earrings of Madame de . . .* . Director: Max Ophuls. © 1953 Gaumont-Rizzoli Films. Publisher: Criterion Collection, 2008. $39.95, 2 discs.

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HALF PAGE

FILMS OF THE YEAR, 2008

JAMES NAREMORE MAKES HIS SELECTION OF THE YEAR'S BEST U.S. RELEASES (INCLUDING ONE FROM THE ARCHIVE)

For readers who missed the 2007 installment of "Films of the Year," let me briefly restate a few caveats. Best-film lists are inherently problematic because nobody can possibly see all the feature-length films released during a given year. In my case, I've had limited access to DVD "screeners" and a few significant films had such late release dates and boutique exhibitions that I couldn't view them in time for this piece. Given the various media formats and policies for distribution, there's also a problem of assigning dates to films. I've tried to confine myself to full-length theatrical pictures that had their first U.S. exhibitions during 2008, but in one instance I chose a film that was made in 1961 and not given a commercial run until last year. Finally, and perhaps this goes without saying, my judgments are personal and unlikely to be exactly the same as yours.

By coincidence, the three films that most interested me during the past year were quasi-documentaries about cities. As many theorists have noted, the cinema itself is a product of urban modernity, offering a mechanically reproduced *flânerie* that shapes and is shaped by our experience of public space. The best-known city documentaries of 1920s modernism (*Manhatta*, 1921; *Berlin: Symphony of a City*, 1927; *Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929; *São Paulo, a Metropolitan Symphony*, 1929; and so forth) were utopian celebrations of speed, metropolitan energy, and cinematic montage; their flip side was the fictional, paranoid city of *M* (1931), although the utopian and dystopian tendencies sometimes mingled, as in *Sunrise* (1927) and *The Crowd* (1928). Postmodernism supposedly swept all this away, rejecting "master narratives" of utopia, dystopia, and even history, giving us the blankly alienated cityscapes of Antonioni, the future-is-now of *Alphaville* (1965), the decentered sprawl of *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985), and the globalized, late-capitalist architecture of *The Dark Knight*, in which Chicago and Hong Kong are virtually interchangeable, not only with each other but also with cityscapes one could find in Dallas, downtown L.A., or the Santa Fe area of Mexico City.

In contrast, the three city films of 2008 discussed here are quite specific about local details and eccentricities of place, and can't be neatly described with the usual period terminology. Each deals with a provincial capital rather than a world-class "cinematic city," each is suffused with ironic nostalgia and a strong sense of history (sometimes mixed with fiction and myth), and each is critical of both past and

NAREMORE'S FILMS OF 2008

1. *24 City* (Jia Zhang-ke)
2. *My Winnipeg* (Guy Maddin)
3. *Of Time and the City* (Terence Davies)
4. *The Exiles* (Kent Mackenzie, 1961)
5. *Wendy and Lucy* (Kelly Reichardt)
6. *Happy-Go-Lucky* (Mike Leigh)
7. *Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfedson)
8. *The Duchess of Langeais* (Jacques Rivette)
9. *Flight of the Red Balloon* (Hou Hsiao-hsien)
10. *The Band's Visit* (Eran Kolirin)

Honorable mention (alphabetically by title): *Che: Part One*, *Che: Part Two* (Steven Soderbergh), *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan), *The Edge of Heaven* (Fatih Akin), *Elite Squad* (José Padilha), *Gran Torino* (Clint Eastwood), *The Last Mistress* (Catherine Breillat), *Mad Detective* (Johnnie To and Ka-Fai Wai), *Milk* (Gus Van Sant), *My Mexican Shiva* (Alejandro Springall), *Native Dancer* (Gulshat Omarova), *Nights and Weekends* (Joe Swanberg), *The Order of Myths* (Margaret Brown), *Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind* (John Gianvito), *A Secret* (Claude Miller), *Trouble the Water* (Carl Deal and Tia Lessin), *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (Woody Allen), *The Visitor* (Thomas McCarthy), *WALL-E* (Andrew Stanton).

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Jia Zhang-ke and Joan Chen

24 City. Courtesy The Cinema Guild.

present. Most important, each maps the city not with an omniscient or panoptic gaze, but with personal memory and the individual body.

1. *24 CITY*

In recent years, director Jia Zhang-ke has been making part fictional, part documentary films about China's turbulent transition from a planned to a market economy. He prefers HDV for these pictures, he says, because changes to the nation are so rapid they require flexible, relatively lightweight equipment to record them. His latest film, *24 City*, is microcosmic in approach, focusing entirely on the demolition of a factory in Chengdu, the ancient capital of Sichuan province—a city which in the past two decades has become best known for its digital communications industry and research institute for the study of pandas. (*24 City* was shot before the 2008 earthquake on the outskirts of Chengdu and before the crisis of global capitalism.) Established in 1958, Factory 420 was a semi-secret government facility employing nearly 30,000 workers for the manufacture and repair of military aircraft engines. After the Vietnam War, demand for its product diminished. It was downsized and retooled to make refrigerators and other consumer products, and then a few years ago its land was sold to a private company for a real-estate development called "24 City." The name of the development sounds appropriate for a science-fiction movie, but actually comes from an ancient Chinese poem: "The cherished hibiscus of 24 city in full bloom / Chengdu shone and prospered."

Brecht once said that you can't understand a factory (and by extension a city) by taking its picture. In *24 City*, which has unusual formal properties, Jia gives us many stunning pictures of the rusted factory being torn down to make room for high-rise condominiums and a five-star hotel. Near the beginning we see a wave of blue-uniformed workers exiting the factory gates—an allusion to *Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895)—followed by beautiful color HDV images photographed by Yu Lik-wai and Wang Yu, showing the remaining laborers on the factory floor using tongs and hammers to manipulate fired, glowing steel ingots. The film documents the factory's subsequent demolition and takes us through the immediate environs—dormitories, streets, and recreation halls where the workers live and play. Occasionally

Demolition and transformation

24 City. Courtesy The Cinema Guild.

it gives us nearly still compositions from within the empty buildings (a butterfly on a windowsill, rain dripping on a broken pane of glass), inserts of historical artifacts (an identity card from the 1960s, an old food-ration coupon), and workers looking straight at the camera as if posing for a Walker Evans photo (these last images play on the effect of stillness vs. motion: a woman poses near a fan that blows her hair; a worker stands with his arm around a pal's shoulder, looking somber, and then lifts his hand to tickle his pal's ear). But despite the mesmerizing beauty of the imagery and the absence of narration, *24 City* gains much of its dramatic force, historical depth, and analytic complexity from words —sometimes from quoted poetry, more often from the oral testimony of individual workers who share their memories of the factory.

The poetry has an ironic and poignant effect. At one point, for example, the words of W. B. Yeats's "The Coming of Wisdom with Time" are shown against a black screen: "Though leaves are many, the root is one; / Through all the lying days of my youth / I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun; / Now I may wither into the truth." Fade into a group of barren trees against the sky; then the camera cranes up to reveal that the trees have been painted on a wall, on the other side of which is the demolished factory. Most of the oral testimonies are also poignant. Jia interviewed over 130 workers or their descendants and distilled their testimony down to filmed interviews with nine people representing five generations. Almost half of these are played by actors—a strategy the film jokes about when Joan Chen's character Little Flower says that in her youth the men at the factory thought she resembled Joan Chen. Some of the interview subjects are shown in dramatized scenes at home or during social encounters, but the interviews themselves, punctuated with intermittent fades to black, tend to be conducted in static long takes against intriguing, deep-focus backgrounds, with the subjects speaking to an off-screen, barely heard questioner (there are no shot/reverse shots in Jia's cinema). Nearly all the interviews have carefully composed, minimalist settings, and they usually lead to weeping disclosures that are crafted like dramatic monologues or short stories (the film was co-written by Jia and Zhai Youngming, a celebrated female poet who specializes in confessional verse).

It would be wrong to conclude from all this that *24 City* is a metafilm designed to comment on the paradoxical relation between documentary and fiction. Its larger purpose is to maintain documentary authenticity while using words, performance signs, and narrative structure to give meaning to fifty years of history. We meet an array of characters, beginning with a machinist who recalls how workers once made their own tools and passed them down to the next generation:

"This small thing," said his mentor, "has come into our hands through those of many others. It can still be used." A woman remembers leaving the countryside to work in the factory for fourteen years, then being laid off. "I'd never come late," she says, "and always did my best," but at the age of forty-one, with a child in school, she was reduced to selling flowers in the street. Another woman tells of a boat journey she and her family took to join the factory, during which she briefly went ashore and lost her child in a crowd; out of patriotic fervor and the need to keep solidarity with her co-workers, she reboarded the boat and left the child behind. The tone here and throughout seems more resigned, sad, or acquiescent than angry.

In the course of the interviews we learn that Factory 420 was once a privileged enclave containing shops, a cinema, and recreational facilities; its workers were fed better than other residents of Chengdu and even had their own bottling plant for soft drinks. When the economy changed, they became poor and marginalized. The culture is now different: a snippet of Chinese opera and a mass singing of "The Internationale" give way to the disco beat of "The World Outside," a pop hit of 1990. A young television announcer, representative of the rising bourgeoisie, tells us that he once tried to work in Factory 420 but the job was so alienating that "something snaps in your mind." The film ends when a "personal shopper" (Zhao Tao, one of Jia's favorite actors) stands high atop the 24 City project and tells us that as a child she wasn't studious and disliked Factory 420; she feels guilty about following a path different from her family and is tearful over their present condition. She's purchased a shiny new car "for credibility" and hopes to make lots of money so that she can give her parents an apartment in 24 City. "I can do it," she says. "I'm the daughter of a worker." At these words, the camera pans away from her and looks out across the immense city of Chengdu, population over eleven million, which we see for the first time, looking grey, amazingly dense, and shrouded in smog. The film has completed its movement from an age of industrialization and mass conformity to an age of individualism and consumerism. Both periods have been treated with tenderness and a sharply critical eye.

2. *MY WINNIPEG*

Winnipeg, Canada, the capital of Manitoba, is located near the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers (also known as the Forks National Historic Site), at the approximate longitudinal center of North America—almost the heart of the heart of the continent. The city takes its name from the Cree Indian words for "muddy water" and was originally a home for herds of bison. It developed into a major center of rail traffic and a home for champion ice skaters, hockey players, and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. The over 600,000 inhabitants are no doubt a hearty folk, because from November through April it snows and is going to snow in Winnipeg.

Unreal city

My Winnipeg. © 2007 Paddlewheel Productions Inc./February Pictures Inc. DVD: Soda Pictures (U.K.).

These facts you can obtain from a website, but Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg*, a "docu-fantasia" about the place where he has lived most of his life, provides a more haunting and amusing guide. The film resembles much of Maddin's recent work (see *Cowards Bend the Knee*, 2003, and *Brand upon the Brain!*, 2006) in being autobiographical, filled with erotic childhood memories, surreal episodes from family life, and playfully scary evocations of incestuous desire and sexual confusion. In this case, autobiographical fantasy is grounded in documentary evidence from family albums, home movies, old recordings, and newsreels. Maddin also gives us animated sequences and reenactments of supposedly true events, so that geography, history, and

local legend mingle with primal domestic scenes, creating a psychological world.

As usual, Maddin's style involves pastiche of silent or decayed black-and-white movies. His staging and decoupage are modern but almost everything is mediated by a dreamlike archeology of intertitles, old-fashioned opticals, gauzy or impressionist photography, and scratched or damaged prints that skip and jitter through the projector. The film's nearly stream-of-consciousness narration (spoken by Maddin) ostensibly emanates from a compartment in a ghostly railroad train, symbolic of movies, where Maddin (played by Darcy Fehr) rubs smudge from a cracked window, squints at the glare from a snowy night, and struggles to remain awake among a group of sleeping passengers. The giant, ghostly head of his mother peers into the window from outside, as if looking into a toy train, and Maddin imagines an aerial view of Winnipeg resembling a woman's genitals. "The Forks, the lap, the Forks, the lap," he repeats to the rhythm of the train, "the lap of my mother, the wooly, furry, frosty lap . . . stay awake, stay awake." He's "stupefied by nostalgia" and wants to leave town, but how to escape? His answer is to film his way out by assembling a cast of actors to play his family, so that he can investigate his origins.

Maddin tells interviewers that he shot *My Winnipeg* on HDV, then projected it onto a refrigerator door and re-shot it. I'm not sure whether to believe this, because in his role as narrator he takes obvious delight in tall tales. He declares that he has rented out his childhood home, which was once located above his mother's beauty parlor (at his mother's request, his father's body has supposedly been disinterred and placed under the living room carpet), and is using it as a set. One of his biggest whoppers is his claim that his mother plays herself; actually, he deserves our gratitude for locating the eighty-six-year-old Ann Savage, the immortal star of *Detour* (1945), and casting her in what would be her last film. (Savage died in her sleep at an L.A. nursing home on Christmas day, 2008.) Many other statements are dubious. According to Maddin, he was born in the hockey rink where his father worked, and his mother was a fan of *LedgeMan*, a Winnipeg-produced TV soap opera about a sensitive young man who, in each episode, threatens to jump from a building ledge and has to be coaxed back inside. He says that Winnipeg has ten times the sleepwalking rate of any city in the world and that Arthur Conan Doyle called it the world's most spirit-haunted city. He also says that there are two taxi companies, one for the main streets and one for the back streets, and that the homeless are required to remain out of sight by camping on rooftops of high buildings. Sometimes provable statements seem to mingle with urban legend. There was indeed a 1919 general strike in Winnipeg, but did armed groups of the local bourgeoisie guard the St. Mary's Academy for Girls in order to keep potential Lolitas from developing a yen for striking Bolsheviks? There was also a fire that caused a herd of racehorses to stampede into a freezing river and become locked in the ice, but did the heads of the dead horses jut surreally from the frozen river all winter long, becoming a romantic gathering place for young lovers?

One of Maddin's aims is to give the city a mythology such as other capitals have, so that it takes on a heightened (if self-deprecating) aura. He also develops a motif of things hidden or repressed beneath surfaces or layers of the city: the buried relics of Indian culture; a snowy hill covering a dangerous garbage mound; the sounds and scents rising up through an air vent from the beauty salon beneath his childhood living room; and a public bathhouse containing three swimming pools atop one another—the bottom pool, according to Maddin, reserved for pubescent boys who run around with hairless boners. In a few instances he drops the mythology altogether and becomes satiric about the attempted erasure of "layers of time beneath asphalt and snow." He's nostalgic for Eaton's department store, which was demolished in the 1990s, and furious with the local politicians and corporate capitalists who tore down a major hockey arena and replaced it with the MTS Centre (Maddin shows the building with a light on its sign burned out, so it reads "MT Centre"), which is too small for a major-league hockey club and looks like "a zombie in a cheap new suit." Such remarks indicate the serious purpose behind his chicanery. He knows that cities, like human subjects, gain their identity from things they build and myths they create about themselves. He also knows that human habitats rest on the sediments of history and that psychoanalysis has been compared to an archeological dig. His cinematic excavation of Winnipeg brilliantly synthesizes public space and private psychology, making the city inseparable from a state of mind.

3. *OF TIME AND THE CITY*

Eight years have passed since Terence Davies's last picture, an excellent adaptation of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (2000), and his welcome return to cinema, *Of Time and the City*, is also a return to his roots. He began his career by making fiction films based on his memories of growing up among a large working-class Catholic family in Liverpool, England; the two best-known of these, *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992), are different in tone (the first deals with an abusive father, the second with pleasures of ordinary life and popular culture) but equally striking in their use of color, 1950s Hollywood music, and

Age of innocence?

Of Time and the City. © 2008 Hurricane City Limited/Digital Departures. DVD: BFI (U.K.).

descriptive montage. *Of Time and the City* has similar properties. A discursive or essay film, it was partly commissioned by the city of Liverpool, which celebrated its 800th anniversary in 2007 and was named a "European Capital of Culture" in the following year; but Davies's approach is personal and far from the civic boosterism implicit in the occasion.

Most U.S. citizens associate Liverpool, a metropolitan borough of roughly 800,000, with the Beatles and the "Mersey beat" of the early 1960s. It had greater importance from the eighteenth century until the 1970s as an industrial seaport. It became a site for grandiose late-Victorian architecture (its skyline is still dominated by the twin spires of the Royal Liver Building, which we see in Davies's film) and a home for Irish immigrant laborers. Beginning in the 1920s, the British government constructed council housing for its working class—row upon row of attached brick homes along narrow paved streets, each with a single step outside the doorway. Heavy bombing in World War II destroyed some of these, but post-war waves of urban renewal destroyed more, replacing them with deeply unpopular, high-rise monoliths. By the second half of the twentieth century, Liverpool's importance as a seaport had greatly declined and its physical character had changed; it nevertheless became a tourist attraction and the second most filmed city in the U.K.

Davies concentrates on the period between 1947, the year of his birth (also the year of the royal wedding between Elizabeth and Philip) and 1973, when he left Liverpool for good. Eighty percent of his film is made of up of eloquent archival footage and still photos, some gathered from private collections, mostly concerning municipal architecture and daily life among the working class in the years after World War II: a father shaving and a mother making breakfast while a child rises from bed; women doing laundry by hand at communal wash basins and then carrying bales of it home on their heads; men handling heavy industrial metal on the docks; children at play in the streets; and crowds enjoying sporting events, holidays, and seaside outings. All this gives way to more recent images of a blighted, graffiti-covered wasteland, then to a hopeful montage of wind turbines and crowds of contemporary Liverpudlians, and finally to a touching shot of a little girl in a pale blue dress dancing in the street.

The film is edited by Davies and Liza Ryan-Carter with beautiful sensitivity to shifts between black-and-white and color, and to movement back and forth in time. Davies says in interviews that he wanted to follow the model of Humphrey Jennings and Stewart McAlister's great wartime documentary, *Listen to Britain* (1942), which has a similarly detached but reverent respect for working people and an

unusual, poetic mode of address. A great deal of the narration Davies speaks in the film is in fact poetry—quotations from Housman, Shelley, Joyce, Whitman, Eliot and others, together with his own verses. The soundtrack also emphasizes music, ranging from sublime uses of classical composers such as Brahms and Mahler to an ironic appropriation of Peggy Lee singing Kern and Hammerstein's "The Folks who Live on the Hill," which is played against images of ugly housing developments.

As the last example may suggest, *Of Time and the City* is both lyrical and critical. Davies gives a scathing account of the British royal family, heaping scorn on "Betty and Phil" and their "thousand flunkies," who spent obscene amounts on a wedding while "the rest of the nation survived on rationing in some of the worst slums in Europe," and he rages against the "*anus mundi*" of post-war housing projects. He has equally angry things to say about his Catholic upbringing, which conflicted with a dawning awareness of his homosexuality. (Perhaps inadvertently echoing Luis Buñuel, he describes himself as "a born-again atheist, thank God.") But he also has sweet memories, mostly about popular culture. At age seven, he saw *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) and became infatuated with classic Hollywood: "My love was as muscular as my Catholicism, but without any of the drawbacks." As he grew older, Dirk Bogarde and the Liverpool wrestling matches made him aware of his sexual inclinations, and on Sunday afternoons, "long before the repeal of the Sexual Offenses Act," he enjoyed the campy double-entendre of *Round the Horne* on the radio.

At times, Davies's plummy, Gielgud-like enunciation is at odds with his affectionate imagery of the working class, and one can hear similar contradictions in some of his attitudes. He rejects religion but is mildly put out when an old Liverpool church becomes a restaurant where "the congregation can have cocktails in the sight of God." He fondly remembers the "love and cellophane" of childhood Christmases, especially his family's "annual exotic pomegranate," but derides most aspects of ordinary life after the 1950s. He prefers the time when "sports men and women knew how to win and lose with grace, and never to punch the air with victory," and he laments the arrival of the Beatles, who resembled "a firm of provincial solicitors" and made "the witty lyric, the well-crafted love song" seem as antiquated as "antimacassars or curling tongs." His film seems to move back and forth between a repressive but sweetly civilized past and a degraded present, only to close with an unearned gesture of solidarity with the new generation. But this pattern isn't necessarily disabling. Davies has a laudatory willingness to reveal himself as an aging artist/intellectual with divided feelings about his past—a man who has escaped an oppressive environment and who now takes comfort in Bruckner and Eliot. His film's greatest virtue is the way it treats time and the city in complex fashion, weaving together intimate memories and public history, nostalgia and anger, making us aware of the persistence of the past in the present, the movement from birth to death, the change of seasons, the diurnal round of light, the radical shifts in the narrator's attitude as he grows older, and the chronology of events that influenced his and other lives.

4. *THE EXILES*

Kent Mackenzie's *The Exiles*, a city film of a different sort than the previous three, was shot in 1958, screened at the Venice film festival in 1961, and not given a commercial release until this past year. Its revival is probably due to Thom Andersen's essay film of 2003, *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, which uses footage from *The Exiles* to illustrate L.A.'s Bunker Hill area. Once associated with immigrant workers, dilapidated Victorian houses, and the Angels' Flight funicular, Bunker Hill was memorably described by novelists John Fante and Raymond Chandler, and used effectively in film noirs such as *Criss Cross* (1949) and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955). It was eventually destroyed to make way for urban renewal and to move what the city regarded as a class of undesirables away from downtown. *The Exiles* provides the best evidence we have of a life that once existed there, and has additional significance because it concentrates on a subculture of Native Americans who had been transplanted to Bunker Hill from Southwestern reservations. As Andersen puts it, the film reveals a city "where reality is opaque, where different social orders exist in the same space without touching each other."

The Exiles tells a simple story, written partly by the actors, of less than twenty-four hours in the lives of three sharply delineated characters who each speak in voiceover. Yvonne Williams, pregnant with the child of Homer Nish, has always wanted a stable married life but has given up hope. Homer, who looks a bit like a chubby Elvis, is alienated from the city and always on the edge of violence. He lolls around the house with his pals, eats pork chops cooked by Yvonne, then goes out for the night to get drunk and start fights. One of his companions is Tommy Reynolds, a seducer and manipulator who mooches money from women, treats them roughly, and blithely admits that he will soon do prison time. These two visit crowded bars and roam neon-lit streets where cops beat up troublemakers. After a wild joy ride in a convertible they end up with a party of Indians on Hill X, near the spot in Chavez Ravine where today the Los Angeles Dodgers have their ballpark. The party becomes increasingly rowdy and

Bunker Hill congeniality

The Exiles. Courtesy Milestone Film and Video.

breaks into a tribal dance, as if liquor had momentarily obliterated the modern world. Finally the two men and a woman they've picked up go back to Bunker Hill in the grey light of dawn.

Mackenzie, who lived to make only one other film, became interested in the Bunker Hill Indians when he was a student at the University of Southern California. He spent a good deal of time earning their confidence, and eventually invited them to play themselves and collaborate in writing their individual stories. Working with friends, he shot much of the film on "short ends," or leftovers from 35mm stock discarded by Hollywood studios. Restored by UCLA preservationist Ross Lipman, the black-and-white photography has a deeply clear, high-contrast beauty that rivals any movie of the period. An open-air market, a gas station, a bar on Central Avenue and various other locations are shown in exhilarating detail and filled with crowds of raw, compelling faces; and the soundtrack is enlivened by the authentic 1950s rock'n'roll of Anthony Hilder and the Revels. The film's greatest virtue, however, is its uncompromised toughness and willingness to let its subjects act "themselves" without too much moral or political preachment by the director. There are two unfortunate exceptions to the rule: at the beginning we see a montage of Edward S. Curtis photographs and hear voiceover lamenting that "the American Indian once lived in the ordered freedom of his own culture," and later we cut away from the Los Angeles locales to a pastoral scene on the reservation. Otherwise *The Exiles* is a fiction film that can be compared with John Cassavetes's *Shadows* (1959) or Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1977—Burnett is one of the producers of this restoration). Like those films, it doesn't try to ingratiate itself with the mainstream audience or make an unfamiliar culture seem acceptable to liberals. Even by today's standards, it seems almost shockingly honest and close to the bone.

5. *WENDY AND LUCY*

The most popular 2008 picture about a dog and its owner was *Marley and Me*, but Kelly Reichardt's *Wendy and Lucy*, a $300,000 wonder in an age when the average Hollywood release costs over $10 million, is better by many miles. If, like me, you think any story involving a homeless waif and her missing pet is bound to be manipulative and cloying, you're wrong; this one avoids emotional pitfalls by virtue of restraint, simplicity, and a rigorous avoidance of melodrama. It's one of the most tense and moving treatments of the thin line between poverty and chaos since *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), which it resembles in some ways.

Wendy Carroll (Michelle Williams) and her dog Lucy arrive at the outskirts of Portland, Oregon after traveling cross-country in Wendy's 1988 Honda. Wendy has $525 in cash and a vague plan to find work in Alaska. She brushes her teeth and changes her underwear in a gas-station restroom, and she and Lucy sleep in the car; but the next morning the car breaks down, Wendy is arrested for shoplifting a bagel and two cans of dog food from a local grocery store, and Lucy goes missing. The rest of the film is a desperate search for the dog, during which money leaks away: a fifty-dollar fine for the arrest, thirty dollars to have the unrepairable car towed, bus fare back and forth to the dog pound, a payphone call for help to an unloving and perhaps broke sister in Indiana, Xeroxing of flyers to announce that Lucy is missing, and so forth. Wendy has no shelter, there are no jobs in the town, and even if there were she couldn't get one without a telephone number and proof of address. But she won't leave until she finds Lucy.

One of the strengths of the screenplay, adapted by Reichardt and Jon Raymond from a story by Raymond, is that it brings Wendy into contact with a larger community in poverty or barely scraping by—teenage drifters, addicts, derelicts, and a variety of low-level service or managerial workers. (The

Elfin distress

Wendy and Lucy. © 2008 Oscilloscope Laboratories.

film was produced in the wake of the Katrina disaster and before the recent economic meltdown.) Most of these characters help Wendy to the extent of their limited powers. The leader of a pack of teenaged "gutter punks" (Will Oldham) gives her a tip about an Alaskan fishery; a tough garage mechanic (Will Patton) charges her less than his usual rate for towing (this after giving free technical advice to another customer on the telephone); and a Walgreen drugstore guard (folk musician Walter Dalton) provides her with encouragement, advice, his cell-phone number in case the dog pound needs to call, and six hard-earned dollars. The only exception to the rule is a sanctimonious supermarket stock boy with a cross around his neck (John Robinson), who badgers his reluctant boss into having Wendy arrested.

I was skeptical of the casting of elfin beauty Michelle Williams and I continue to wonder if the film would be better with a plain-looking actor, but Williams gives a poignant and convincing performance. In a helmet of dark hair, a hoodie, and cutoff jeans, she seems frail but also stoic and resilient—although how Wendy will survive in Alaska with such paltry clothing, assuming she ever gets to Alaska, is anybody's guess. (Lucy, a brown-gold mutt with floppy ears and a sweet disposition, nicely plays herself—she's Kelly Reichardt's dog.) The film's relative lack of dialogue makes Williams's work all the more important, and the sound design by Leslie Shatz and Eric Offin is unobtrusively effective, consisting of nothing more than Wendy's isolated humming (at one point orchestrated as supermarket musak) and cleverly mixed traffic and railroad noises. Photographer Sam Levy, working with available light, makes fine use of Oregon's verdant woods and clear air, and the film also benefits from Reichardt's early experience as a still photographer. In an interview with *The New York Times*, she has acknowledged indebtedness to the school of Stephen Shore, Robert Adams, and Joe Deal, who photograph "man-altered landscapes." Her images of the built environment—a gas station, a rail yard, a wall with graffiti—have an unassuming but museum-worthy power and beauty thoroughly in keeping with the humane realism of the film as a whole.

6. *HAPPY-GO-LUCKY*

The first words spoken by Poppy, the North London elementary school teacher played by Sally Hawkins in Mike Leigh's latest film, are in a bookstore where she spots a volume called *Road to Reality*. "I don't want to be going there!" she gurgles, popping it back on the shelf. She prefers browsing in the children's section. As she exits, she looks back at the surly and suspicious clerk, and gyrates as if shoplifter alarm bells were going off. Outside, she discovers her bicycle has been stolen and sighs, "We didn't even get to say goodbye."

Judging from a minority of reviews, some people are annoyed by this apparently daffy young woman, who, after injuring her back from jumping on a trampoline, laughs as she winces with pain. To me she's charismatic, almost a secular saint, though admittedly saints can be wearing over time. Despite her bubbly enthusiasm and smiley face, Poppy is no airheaded Pollyanna. She's instinctively kind and perceptive, much more knowledgeable and intelligent than she first appears (early in the film, during a drunken night out with her girlfriends, she makes farting sounds with her mouth and mimes a telephone conversation with one of her falsies), and there are depths to her personality—shadings and forms of humor, moments when her smile fades or drops to reveal an awareness of existential dark.

A bookend to *Naked* (1993), Leigh's very dark film about an equally charismatic but almost sociopathic character, *Happy-Go-Lucky* takes place mostly in sunlight and is often quite funny. Its thirty-year-old heroine wistfully hopes to find a man, and sure enough she develops a sweet and sexy relationship with a tall, easygoing social worker (Samuel Roukin). Nevertheless, the open-ended story isn't quite a comedy and one feels it could easily swerve into sadness or catastrophe. It was created in Leigh's usual fashion, through lengthy work with actors who built their characters through improvisation. The ostensibly aimless plot (originally about three hours long) is structured by themes of friendship and teaching, linked together when Poppy tells a troubled student that she wants to help him because "that's what mates do." Poppy's driving instructor, Scott (Eddie Marsan), is the sort of person this student might otherwise grow into—a paranoid bully, probably abused in childhood, who rages against blacks and teaches through intimidation and proto-Nazi discipline. The scenes between him and Poppy, some of them shot with long takes in which the actors control the rhythm, create an uneasy laughter from a wildly mismatched couple, and are nicely calibrated to reveal how Poppy uses humor to cope with Scott's anger and her own nervousness; she gradually blunts his rage and challenges his ideas, but he's a frightening character, beyond redemption.

Elsewhere, Poppy is a loving companion to her potentially depressive flat mate (Alexis Zegerman) and a supportive voice for her two sisters (Kate O'Flynn and Caroline Martin), one of whom is sulky, the other jealous. The only false note in the film is a scene in an urban wasteland after dark, where Poppy encounters a homeless schizophrenic (Stanley Townsend) and listens empathetically as he talks. (Contrast the scene in *Wendy and Lucy* when Wendy encounters a schizophrenic in the woods.) But this flaw is more than redeemed by the broader arc of Hawkins's performance, which is almost Chaplinesque in its emotional sensitivity, timing, and comic eccentricity: see, for example, her birdlike stance, stomping feet, and goofy grin when she takes Flamenco lessons from a haughty, emotionally overwrought Spaniard. According to actor Donald Wolfit, death is easy and comedy hard. Hawkins's work in *Happy-Go-Lucky* might be harder still—she creates an unsentimental, endearing, and believably good character whose kindness and optimism ameliorate the disappointment, cruelty, and danger of ordinary life.

A secular saint

Happy-Go-Lucky. © 2007 Untitled '06 Distribution Limited/Channel 4 Television Corporation/UK Film Council. DVD: Momentum Pictures Home Entertainment (U.K.).

7. LET THE RIGHT ONE IN

According to vampire lore, those frightening, blood-sucking creatures can't invade your home but must be invited in; hence they tend to be seductive or hypnotic, and their horror is usually sexual, sometimes even romantic. Early vampire films use this myth for ideologically conservative ends; in the Bram Stoker adaptations, for example, the vampire is a decadent, aristocratic, but alien figure representing ambiguous sexuality and whatever else the society might fear, and is destroyed by the forces of Christian patriarchy. In more recent times, a liberal or radical version of the myth dominates and the values are reversed: Dracula becomes a rebellious lover in a Puritan world (Maddin's *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary*, 2002) or an alien in a sick society (the tortured adolescent in George A. Romero's 1977 *Martin*, or the female philosophy student in Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction*, 1995).

Swedish director Tomas Alfredson's melancholy, creepy, emotionally touching *Let the Right One In*, adapted by John Ajvide Lindqvist from his own novel, belongs in the second category but offers some clever new twists. The title derives from a song by British rock star Morrissey, whose suggestive lyrics speak of the need to leave an unsatisfactory world behind and "let the right one slip in." In this case, the "right one" is a dark, sickly girl (Lina Leandersson) who moves next door to a pale, androgynous boy (Kåre Hedebrant) of twelve. "I've been twelve a long time," she tells him, and she certainly has. When we first see the boy, he's standing in the window of his apartment on a winter night, wearing nothing but his undershorts, holding a knife and quietly calling for "Piggy." The girl next door has unwashed hair, big eyes, and a growling stomach. She doesn't wear winter clothes, and she lives with a strange older man who might be her father and who commits an awful murder in order to bring her a bag of blood.

I won't reveal more of the well-constructed and surprising plot, except to say that it involves a presexual relationship between two lonely outsiders, and results in both a horror film and a potentially tragic love story. Where horror is concerned, there are plenty of well-timed, frightening, and blackly humorous moments, and I've never seen more spooky and effective use of CGI effects. Director Alfredson and his photographer Hoyte van Hoytema also make excellent use of the Swedish locales (especially a concrete housing project with an eerie, erotic advertising poster covering one of the windows), creating an atmosphere of cold, clear silence where bloody murder occasionally erupts. The most unusual aspect of the film has to do with the bond that develops between the boy and girl. Their prepubescent, slightly indeterminate gender makes their interaction at once sexual and weirdly Platonic. "Will you be my girlfriend?" the boy asks. She agrees, even though she's an older woman and tells him that she has an odd-looking body. He needs her friendship to survive a disturbing life at home and at school, and she needs his loving assistance. Unfortunately, he lives in a world of time and she will be undead forever.

I'm sorry to report that Hollywood plans to remake this small, perfect film under the supervision of Matt Reeves (*Cloverfield*).

Survival skills

Let the Right One In. © 2008 EFTI. DVD: Magnolia Home Entertainment.

8. *THE DUCHESS OF LANGEAIS*

Jacques Rivette's film deserves analysis not only for its dramatic power but also for its specific virtues as a costume picture adapted from a nineteenth-century novella by Balzac (an author Rivette has adapted before, in *La Belle noiseuse*, 1991). Set largely in Restoration Paris and told in flashback, the film concerns a frustrated love affair between a Napoleonic-era military officer, General Armand de Montriveau (Guillaume Depardieu, who died in 2008), and a flirtatious aristocrat, the Duchess of Langeais (Jeanne Balibar). The general is a leonine, scowling romantic with a wooden leg (Depardieu was an actual amputee) and the duchess a raven-haired, ultramontane Catholic with the seductive body of a dancer. Rivette, who has long been interested in the relation between theater and cinema, emphasizes the theatrical nature of their affair. The duchess invites the general to a series of private meetings in her home (her husband is permanently absent) and subjects him to The Big Tease, carefully controlling her costume, hair, lighting, and mise-en-scène, ultimately turning him into her "orderly." Five years later, after spurning him, then falling truly in love with him, and then being rejected by him in return, she has joined an order of barefoot Carmelites in Spain. When he finds her at the nunnery, a scarlet curtain drops to reveal her standing on an empty stage, where she has been singing a mournful song of parting ("River Tage," by J. H. Demeun and B. Pollet).

The film is especially interesting for the way it respects what Lionel Trilling, in an essay entitled "The Sense of the Past," calls "historicity." Many older works of literature, Trilling points out, are acceptable only when they are understood to have been written in the past; indeed their pastness is inseparable from their positive aesthetic effect. In adapting Balzac, Rivette avoids pastiche but is sensitive to the nineteenth century's historically available expressive conventions. He achieves suspense, an air of estrangement, and sometimes a comic irony from the conflict between highly formalized manners and impulsive romanticism, and he makes good use of intertitles to convey the rather arch tone of Balzac's narration. His approach is quite different from Catherine Breillat's overtly sexy *The Last Mistress*, which is an adaptation of a nineteenth-century novel about a similar milieu, and in some ways closer to the austere historicism of Rossellini's *The Taking of Power by Louis XIV* (1966—available this year on a fine DVD from Criterion). Like Rossellini, Rivette appreciates the value of dramatic pauses, long takes, and real duration. *The Duchess of Langeais* is a leisurely film (two hours and seventeen minutes), confined mostly to interiors, directed in a style that

Amour fou

The Duchess of Langeais. © 2006 Pierre Grise Productions/Arte France Cinéma/Cinemaundici.
DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.).

provides a correlative to Balzac's leisurely fiction. Some of its best dramatic effects are the moments when the general silently waits for the duchess, or when his wooden leg clomps across the floorboards of a society ballroom and the marble stones of a church. Rivette makes no attempt to be completely "faithful" to his source, but he intelligently adapts Balzac and in the process creates a detached yet quietly intense dramatization of *amour fou*.

9. *THE FLIGHT OF THE RED BALLOON*

Speaking of long takes, there are some beauties in Hou Hsiao-hsien's homage to Albert Lamorisse's *The Red Balloon* (1956); and fittingly so, since the Lamorisse short is best known among cinephiles as the subject of one of André Bazin's most influential essays in defense of single-shot aesthetics, "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage." Hou's picture is set in Paris, where a slightly anthropomorphic red balloon drifts through picturesque sights, occasionally floating near a little boy (Simon Iteanu). A film student from China (Fang Song) takes a job as the boy's nanny and eventually decides to make a video about him and a red balloon (she's a surrogate for Hou, and we see a bit of her film within his). The only fully developed character is the boy's neurotic but loving mother (Juliette Binoche), who works as a voice artist in a puppet show specializing in classic Asian stories.

Meandering life

The Flight of the Red Balloon. © HHH Productions/Margo Films/Les Films du Lendemain/ARTE France Cinéma. DVD: Network (U.K.).

(One of Hou's most admired films is *The Puppet Master*, 1993, about classic Chinese puppet shows.) She lives a scattered life, trying to cope with a deadbeat ex-husband, a daughter in Brussels who doesn't want to come home, and a downstairs tenant who won't pay the rent.

As David Bordwell has pointed out, one mark of Hou's style is that he doesn't provide strong causal links between scenes. *Flight of the Red Balloon* gives us a string of loosely related incidents, most of them occurring in the boy and his mother's cluttered, semi-bohemian apartment, where we see the nanny making crepes or working at a computer, the boy at his PlayStation, the mother bursting in from outside, and an occasional workman or visitor on an errand. Through the device of the nanny we gradually learn revealing things about the boy and mother, but the film requires us to reorient ourselves with each new sequence and has no clear-cut narrative goal. As a result, space takes precedence over plot, and Hou's fascinating long takes are among the chief sources of interest. He typically sets the camera at one end of the apartment, framing bodies in doorways, staging occasional entrances and exits, now and then panning from one spot to another. One of the more crowded shots, lasting over eight minutes, involves the boy, the nanny, a blind piano tuner, and a mildly violent confrontation between the mother and the angry downstairs tenant. Here and elsewhere, the film supports Bazin's notion that "essential cinema" is found in "straightforward photographic respect for the unity of space." It also has a charmingly calm, meandering rhythm perfectly suited to a free-floating balloon. Near the end we visit the Musée d'Orsay, where a teacher shows the boy and his schoolmates Félix Vallotton's 1899 painting, *Le Ballon*. Their discussion offers us a way of looking at the film itself: we see a child, a red balloon, and a couple of adults in a large, variegated space where the eye can wander from one interesting point to another; it's a lovely, mysterious picture, and, as one of the children says, it seems both happy and sad.

10. *THE BAND'S VISIT*

Most of the films I've been discussing are about cities; but my last choice, the charmingly funny *The Band's Visit*, is a film about what one of its characters calls "bloody nowhere." It tells the story of an eight-piece Egyptian military band in ceremonial garb, the Alexandria Ceremonial Orchestra, which is scheduled to give a concert at the Arab Cultural Center of an Israeli town called Petah Tikva. Unable to pronounce Hebrew, the band takes the wrong bus and winds up in Bet Hatikvah. The place looks like nothing but a few multi-level buildings sticking out of a flat desert. "No culture," a resident explains. "Not Israeli culture, not Arab, no culture at all." A couple of locals make room for the stranded band to spend the night, and smalltown boredom prompts halting communication with broken English and bits of music. The earthy and sexy owner of a roadside café (Ronit Elkabetz) is attracted to the stolid, somewhat mournful band leader (Sasson Gabai); the band's painfully insecure second-in-command (Khalifa Natour) finds an audience for his unfinished "overture for a concerto"; and the band's youngest member (Saleh Bakri), a restless ladies' man, visits a roller rink and gives advice to a shy teenager about how to woo a woman.

Curiosity and discomfort

The Band's Visit. © 2007 The Band's Visit Limited Partnership. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (U.K.).

The setting, a barren no-place, makes the pleasant fantasy of communion between Egyptians and Israelis seem plausible, and enables writer–director Eran Kolirin to create a slow-paced comedy of surreal or strangely offbeat situations—as when the band stands silently on an empty roadside in their powder-blue uniforms, or when the young lothario makes a pass at a girl who sells bus tickets: "You have eyes! Very beautiful eyes! Do you like Chet Baker?" He sings a couple of bars of "My Funny Valentine" and slyly announces, "I play violin in orchestra, but I also play trumpet." Kolirin understands that the space of film comedy is usually flat rather than deep, and takes advantage of the minimalist environment to line up objects or people parallel to the picture plane—in the first shot, for example, the driver of a parked white van with its side to the camera gets out, removes a big yellow ball from the rear door, takes it to the front, climbs in, and drives off to reveal the band standing in a row along the curb; after a few beats of silence, a woman pushing a luggage cart walks right to left directly across the screen in front of them, ignoring them completely.

The film makes equally good comic uses of the Kuleshov Effect: see the reaction shot of two band members when the café owner slices aggressively into a watermelon; see also the deadpan close-ups of the two when she sits down and props a bare, ankle-braceleted foot on a table. One of the best pieces of editing is a scene involving seven people—three band members with two local citizens and their wives—crowded together at small dinner table. The Egyptians are intensely uncomfortable and the wives hostile (it's a birthday for one of them), but the male hosts try to make conversation about music. The laughs derive from nicely timed close-ups of silent reactions, plus a wide shot of an angry wife clearing dishes from the table as the men join in an awkward singing of "Summertime." In the end, all this humor ultimately gives way to bittersweet sentiment as the café owner and the band leader get to know one another—a shift of tone that the director and actors subtly prepare for and accomplish with grace.

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ABSTRACT Prefaced by remarks about methodology, the article presents the author's selection of the best films released in the U.S., 2008 (including one archival reissue). The top three are all city films: Jia Zhang-ke's *24 City*, Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg*, and Terence Davies's *Of Time and the City.*

KEYWORDS Jia Zhang-ke, Guy Maddin, Terence Davies, evaluation, best films of 2008

AGAINST THE CLOCK: *SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE* AND *THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON*

J. M. TYREE DISCUSSES HOW TWO OSCAR-WINNING ROMANTIC BLOCKBUSTERS PLAY VARIATIONS ON THEMES OF LOVE AND TRANSIENCE

A surprising number of connective threads can be drawn between 2008's Academy Award winner for Best Picture, *Slumdog Millionaire*, and the most-nominated film of the season, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Both are peculiar, ambitious films that mix sweet notes with harsh undertones; both are literary adaptations from fable-like source material; and both are directed by reformed bad boys, Danny Boyle and David Fincher. Who knew that Boyle and Fincher, like a pair of mellowed biker dudes getting tattoos of their moms on their triceps, had such sentimentality in them?

In the 1990s, both directors built their reputations on culty movies with unsqueamish visions of extreme violence, from Boyle's *Trainspotting* (1996) and *28 Days Later* (2002) to Fincher's *Se7en* (1995) and *Fight Club* (1999). Two genre-surfers, between them Boyle and Fincher have made sci-fi pictures (*Sunshine*, 2007, and *Alien*^{3}, 1992), offbeat thrillers (*Shallow Grave*, 1994, and *Panic Room*, 2002), and horror features, both supernatural and secular (*28 Days Later* and *Zodiac*, 2007). These films share an arch stylishness, a "coolness" that is most clearly visible in Fincher's *The Game* (1997), a ruthless mockery of the action film. What did these laddish pulp auteurs want with anything resembling a feel-good property, never mind a maudlin three-hour adaptation of an F. Scott Fitzgerald short story about a man who ages backwards, on one hand, and, on the other, a game-show Bollywoody picaresque featuring a slum kid's rise from poverty to superstardom in his quest for true love? Surely there's more to this than a shared attempt by two "edgy" but mainstream directors to tackle yet another genre, the "Best Picture Picture."

The link between violence and male sentimentality might be apropos. For example, when Cormac McCarthy turned his attention to paternal love in his 2006 novel, *The Road*, he did not stint on the bloodshed, swathing his story in futuristic ecocide, with a trademark side order of cannibalism. In the same way, these two directors balance savagery and soft-heartedness. In retrospect, one finds out much in Fincher that is similarly and bizarrely tender amid the gore, from the contemplative robbers in *Panic Room* to the camaraderie of the newsroom in *Zodiac*. And Fincher puts his stamp early on in *Benjamin Button* by changing the plot of Fitzgerald's story to slaughter the mother during Benjamin's birth, showing us her bloodstained midsection. Here is one of the problems of *Slumdog Millionaire* also: this is a supposedly touchy-feely feature replete with platitudes about eternal love that indulges in backroom police torture, child prostitution, begging rackets, and anti-Muslim massacres in the alleys of Mumbai.

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The Curious Case of Benjamin Button is based upon an ironic 1921 gem by Fitzgerald in which a man ages backwards, seeing American history from the Civil War to the 1920s. In the film, Benjamin (Brad Pitt) ages in reverse from World War I through World War II and the 1960s. This conceit reverberates with a number of bittersweet artistic ruminations on growing pains: from Samuel Butler's *Notebooks* and Mark Twain's regret that "the best part of a man's life came at the beginning and the worst part at the end," to Woody Allen's comment that "I want to live my life backwards. You start out dead and get that out of the way." Fitzgerald's story is cut from the same cloth, filled with dry-martini witticisms such as "they were years of normal ungrowth." In the story, the (adult-sized) old man fresh out of the womb complains about drinking milk, can't fit into his crib, and smokes cigars. It's regrettable that Fincher chose to scrub out most of the traces of this nicotine-stained humor.

Slumdog Millionaire also is based upon a literary source, *Q&A* by Vikas Swarup (first published in 2005). The film's protagonist, Jamal Malik (played by three Indian actors including Dev Patel), ascends from the slums to triumph on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* because his crushing past has provided him with all the right answers on the quiz show.

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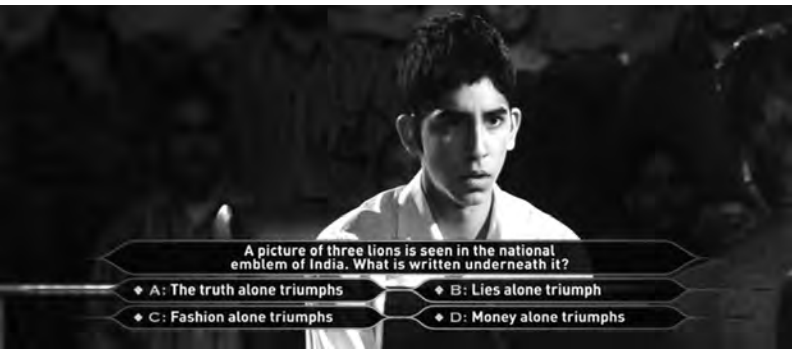

TV frame stories

Left: *Slumdog Millionaire*. © 2008 Celador Films Limited/Channel 4 Television Corporation. DVD: Twentieth Century Fox. Right: *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. © 2008 Paramount Pictures Corporation/Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. DVD: Paramount.

But while Fitzgerald and Fincher toy with an inverted sense of time that induces rueful melancholy, in *Slumdog Millionaire* teleology rules: events are patterned in an orderly trajectory, and time is on the side of the protagonist. Cinema audiences everywhere are now gladdened by the convenience that during the course of the film Jamal learns the answers to the quiz show questions *in the same order* as his own life experiences, making the telling of his own life story sequentially parallel with the unfolding drama of the television show. The cop interrogating him (Irrfan Khan) describes his story as "bizarrely plausible." Not really, but that's far from the point; in fact, the film is searching, through a seamless but highly artificial plot contrivance, for a sense of coherence in which the accumulated experience of life will add up after all to a unified whole, everything falling into the right place. *Slumdog Millionaire* repeatedly displays scraps and shreds of images early on—a beautiful young woman looking up, paper money filling a tub like bathwater—whose final meaning only becomes clear in retrospect.

The picaresque element of both films makes them epic fables. In the case of *Benjamin Button*, the epic is national, framed by the impending cataclysm of Hurricane Katrina (Fincher's most debatable device, which has no counterpart in the short story) and unfolding against the sweeping backdrop of America's involvement in two world wars. The film depicts national history as a series of tragedies rather than triumphs, reasons to mourn not to celebrate. After introducing its frame story, the film opens in World War I-era New Orleans with the tale of Mr. Gateaux (Elias Kotas), a New Orleans clockmaker who invents a timepiece that runs in reverse, symbolizing his dream of resurrecting his dead son. *Benjamin Button* is a far more sorrowful affair than *Slumdog Millionaire*, to say the least—this crazy clock, like all projects concerned with recapturing lost time, can't work. When separated lovers Benjamin and Daisy (Cate Blanchett) are reunited, time remains time, and it all too quickly slips away.

In *Slumdog Millionaire*, it's always possible to beat the clock at the last second, to slip from the clutches of one's pursuers—indicative of a very different, optimistic, international sense of epic possibility. It could be called a kind of global epic or an epic that sells a certain dated type of globalism in which the boom times are infinite. It's alert and playful about all this: the plot turns on an internationally franchised quiz show in which a key question turns on Jamal knowing which "American statesmen appears on the hundred dollar bill?" *Slumdog Millionaire* depicts the transformation of a world city—"Bombay had become Mumbai," Jamal muses—to a place of high-rise condos and call centers that sell mobile phones to patrons in Britain and Scotland. Meanwhile, his brother Salim (Madhur Mittal) is "at the center of the center" of the underworld, where gangster developers are changing what "used to be our slum" into the new "all business" India. One of the film's most memorable sequences shows Jamal and Salim entering a life of crime at the Taj Mahal, stealing the shoes and stripping the cars of global tourists, and giving fake tours of the landmark as a "five star hotel" with a magnificent swimming pool.

Slumdog Millionaire is knowing about cultural exchange. While it references the Bollywood underworld film *Zanjeer* (1973), *Zanjeer* itself was based on *Death Rides a Horse*, a 1967 Western about American gunslingers made by Italians, whereas *Slumdog Millionaire* is a British production shot in contemporary India using many unknown Indian actors. Nikhat Kazmi pointed out in *The Times of India* (January 22, 2009) that the two-brothers-rising-through-the-underworld storyline in *Slumdog Millionaire* is classic "Bollywood *masala*." But surely Boyle's film is more inventively self-aware than this remark suggests, even coming up with an allegory of cinematic recycling (call it pay dirt): the arresting sequence involving Jamal's mastery of the answer to a question involving Amitabh Bachchan, the star of *Zanjeer*, and Jamal's willingness to dive into the bowels of an outhouse to get the star's autograph, resulting in the

Love conquers all

Slumdog Millionaire. © 2008 Celador Films Limited/Channel 4 Television Corporation. DVD: Twentieth Century Fox.

film's most memorable image, a triumphant, slime-covered Jamal holding a still from the movies aloft.

With such delirious visuals and its insistent images of real poverty, *Slumdog Millionaire* is a long way from another recent picture of India, *The Darjeeling Limited* (Wes Anderson, 2007). While that film was accused of infantilizing Indian culture by showing sweetness and light—hand-painted trains and the like—it is at least consistent in its sugarcoating, unlike *Slumdog Millionaire*. Although Boyle's film has nothing on the brutality of its source material in Q&A, it depicts the horrors of slum girls bred for underage prostitution and beggar children blinded by their owners for retail display. And there is quasi-documentary footage here of real locations and real misery mixed up with this fairy tale: people bathing in trash-strewn rivers; a bull walking through a garbage dump; a sequence of multiplying rooftops showing the vast scale of a Mumbai slum. *Slumdog Millionaire* wants to have it both ways by allowing images of actual horror to seep into a Bollywood-like dream and then letting us off the hook by suggesting not only that true love conquers all, but also that personal decency might well result in a multimillion-dollar payday. Boyle wants to break the glass from time to time so that the film doesn't become saccharine and so that his audience can't derive false comfort from its "rags-to-raja" tale. But by doing so he creates cracks in the picture that can't be fixed by seeing its young actors frolicking at Disneyland and on the Oscar-night red carpet. There is a contradiction between what the film tells us about how the universe operates and what it shows us about abject poverty.

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These two films have two very different, sometimes perplexing relationships with time. *Slumdog Millionaire* unfolds in

Time conquers all

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button. © 2008 Paramount Pictures Corporation/Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. DVD: Paramount.

discrete narrative chunks interlaced with repeated images that are screened again and again outside of their accurate chronological placement. We see Latika (Freida Pinto), Jamal's great love, as an adult when they are supposed to be children, and as a child when they are adults. This works on a narrative level because much of the film takes place in flashback as Jamal recounts his life to his police tormentors on the night before he wins twenty million rupees. These images are the visual keynotes of his memory, but they also act as timeless hieroglyphs that, like his love for Latika, anchor his existence outside the blur of real events. The film is shameless and relentless in its argument that love exists in a zone purified from the taint of time and the cavalcade of horrors that time inflicts on its lovers.

One of the themes of *Benjamin Button*—that true love unforgettingly waits a very long time—appears similar on the surface. Where *Benjamin Button* is more intriguing is in its taxing of the audience's patience for side-narratives, detours, and long tangent lines that have nothing or almost nothing to do with the core story. Within the frame story about Hurricane Katrina and the loosely structured plot showing Benjamin aging backward, there are strings of melancholy vignettes, many of which are as much about mood as they are about plot. This fact is suggested by the actors' credited order of appearance, in which Brad Pitt appears around number 40 or so (Tilda Swinton is not even listed in the cast overview). In a memorable section of the film, Benjamin travels to Murmansk, Russia, and has an affair with Elizabeth Abbott (Swinton), the wife of a British diplomat–spy. During this lengthy interlude, Abbott and Button, two castaways on a tide of historical flotsam and jetsam, argue about how long to steep tea, eat caviar, drink champagne, discuss her failed at-

tempt to swim the English channel, and make love in an empty room of an old hotel. One day Abbott disappears, her husband called back to London just before the outbreak of World War II, leaving a note for Button reading, "it was nice to have met you."

We never see Abbott again apart from two key glimpses. The first comes when Button watches his old lover many years later on television after becoming the Oldest Woman to Swim the English Channel. An image of Abbott returns near the very end of the film, in a series of snapshots of the odd characters Benjamin has known throughout his life, including Captain Mike (Jared Harris), skipper of a New Orleans tugboat that Button adventured with in Murmansk and beyond during World War II. The threads of the story hang loose in a deliberate course of indirection, though Fincher adds an ingenious and charming way of tying the strands together: just as Abbott reappears for Button on television, a hummingbird described by Mike is seen by Button after Mike's death during a battle at sea, then pops up again at Daisy's deathbed on the eve of Katrina, seen only by her daughter Caroline (Julie Ormond), bringing her an ounce of comfort before the storm drowns the city. Is this a suggestion that our small gestures of kindness matter in a world engulfed by darkness, natural and man-made? Or is it the film's way of forcing some order into life that doesn't really exist, in the same way that the flashback structure of *Slumdog Millionaire* imposes a clunky coherence on disorderly events? At these moments, *Benjamin Button* steers closer to *Slumdog Millionaire*'s optimism. Yet the film ends with the audience presuming all hands will be lost in Katrina's flood.

The melancholy and sea-fog loneliness hanging over the film is true to a certain form of Fitzgeraldian ruined splendor, and its Hurricane Katrina frame story makes *Benjamin Button* a fable for an Age of Catastrophes in which things cannot end well. The film suggests that we only have a moment to live, but it also depicts the very lengthy stretches of life that are wasted or mis-lived, while showing moments of connection and happiness as fleeting. This makes *Benjamin Button* ultimately very different than *Slumdog Millionaire*. In Boyle's film, time really can be recaptured through the magic of love. Jamal and Latika are in love, have always been in love, and will always be in love. No ill fate can "truly" harm them—as the film's cleverly deployed tagline says, "It is written." Their lives will always circle back to one another. After the film ends, they will always be happy forevermore. *Slumdog Millionaire* believes in love's ability to stop time altogether. "It's too late," Latika tells Jamal. "What will we live on?" Jamal's stock answer, of course, is "love."

There are moments in both *Benjamin Button* and *Slumdog Millionaire* when the films themselves run backward, "undoing" a moment of brutal damage. In *Benjamin Button*, as the symbolic clock is unveiled, we see images of doughboys being plucked back from the enemy trenches through no-man's-land to the safety of the time before they died. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, when Jamal finally kisses Latika on her "disfiguring" scar, the kiss rewinds an incident in which Latika met him at a train station, only to be pursued and dragged away by Salim to her tyrannical gangster boyfriend. Of course, this rewinding only takes place through the apparatus of the cinema, which can stop time, freeze-frame or rewind, but the story of *Slumdog Millionaire* endorses a wish-fulfillment view of temporality by which disasters can be undone—it really is as though nothing bad had ever happened, just as Latika's scar increases her beauty.

"Are you afraid?" Caroline asks her dying mother, the keeper of Benjamin Button's story. In *Benjamin Button*, the elixir of the fountain of youth is viewed in successive stages, as a miracle by some, as a monstrosity by others, and finally as a great sorrow. Yes, the film is structured to deliver payoffs such as seeing a rejuvenated Brad Pitt, uncannily restored by digital effects to the looks he had in *Thelma & Louise* (1991). But it descends from there into the terror of a grade-school boy with Alzheimer's, then the babbling senility of an infant. In *Benjamin Button*, this inversion of time and the aging process is, by contrast with *Slumdog Millionaire*, shown to be heartbreaking. Despite all the mysterious counteracting of time, and the storyteller's manipulation of it, death comes anyway. The end of the film shows the reverse-time clock being subsumed by Katrina's storm surge. "You never get it back, wasted time," Abbott tells Benjamin, as she dreams of undoing all her past mistakes. It can't be done, but there are other consolations, other ways in which time's misfits care for one another in the film.

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ABSTRACT A comparison of two award-winning cinematic romances in terms of their diverging treatments of love and time: whereas *Slumdog Millionaire* moves toward a happy ending, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* is more melancholy.

KEYWORDS *Slumdog Millionaire, The Curious Case of Benjamin Button,* Danny Boyle, David Fincher, love stories

DVD DATA *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button.* Director: David Fincher. © 2008 Paramount Pictures Corporation / Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Publisher: Paramount, 2009. $29.98, 1 disc.

Slumdog Millionaire. Director: Danny Boyle. © 2008 Celador Films Limited / Channel 4 Television Corporation. Publisher: Twentieth Century Fox, 2009. $29.98, 1 disc.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE: MEDIATING TORTURE

CAETLIN BENSON-ALLOTT EXPLORES THE INCONCLUSIVE DIGITALITY AT STAKE IN ERROL MORRIS'S ABU GHRAIB DOCUMENTARY

To hear Errol Morris tell it, his entire career as a "nonfiction feature" filmmaker has been "very much in reaction to a prevailing idea about how documentaries should be made. Namely, shoot them verité, truth cinema. There was this idea that if you follow certain rules, if you shoot things in a certain way, then out pops the truth."[1] Dismissing cinema verité with the observation that one "style doesn't guarantee truth," Morris tries to defuse criticism of his own style, which reviewers have derided as too beautiful, too mannered, and too *cinematic* for documentary. Many critics of his most recent film, *Standard Operating Procedure*, excoriate Morris for exploiting an "insinuating score" by Hollywood composer Danny Elfman and employing "a costume designer, a wardrobe stylist, six hair and make-up people, an action consultant, an armorer, five set dressers, seven animal handlers, ten prop masters, [and] thirty-three cast members."[2] Some of their condemnations even approach shrieks of betrayal while alleging that Morris borrows lighting designs and slow-motion cinematography from his award-winning ad campaigns to push his film beyond documentary skepticism into a "form of lofty yet snide, know-it-all epistemological inquiry."[3] They are also, perhaps justifiably, shocked that Morris admits to paying his subjects, the "bad apples" of the Abu Ghraib detainee abuse scandal, and listens seriously to their justifications and self-exonerations. However, these critics do not consider that mediation is precisely the subject of Morris's documentary. *Standard Operating Procedure* studies the photographs taken by the 372nd U.S. Military Police Company at the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq, and it is as much about digital ontology as it is about (photographed) detainee abuse. The film leaves its viewer uncertain about the images' ability to reveal unmediated truths precisely because Morris wants to investigate how others manipulate our belief they could.

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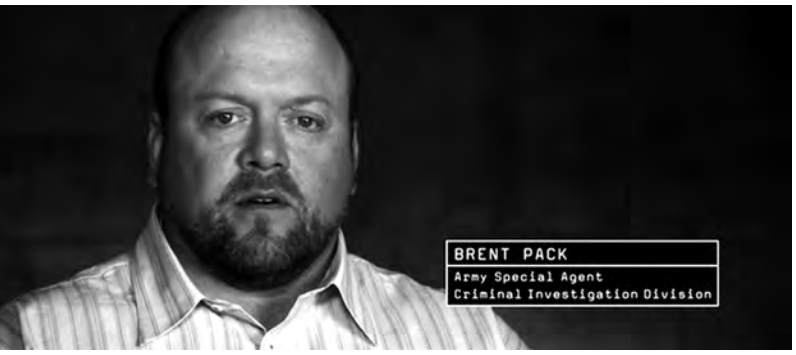
In the case of Abu Ghraib, this belief arises from an understandable social and political need to grasp what happened at the prison and why it was photographed. Morris's *oeuvre* arguably nominates him as the ideal documentarian to pursue this enigma—or perhaps to suggest why no explanation can lay it to rest. Morris has made a career of questioning the limits of human memory and filmic evidence. His 1987 film, *The Thin Blue Line*, inaugurated a new strategy for documentary filmmaking premised on providing interviewees with enough unstructured camera time to reveal their unreliability as sources. This approach leads Morris to chronicle contingent, relative, and subjective histories—and in the case of his latest film to twelve personal accounts from the "bad apples" about what happened at Abu Ghraib. Morris's methodology does limit the number of voices in *Standard Operating Procedure*, but it gives the film time to contemplate the act of interpretation and the troublingly unstable relationship between digitality and photo-ontology. By mixing its talking heads with the photographs from the prison, expressionist reenactments, and other CGI illusions, *Standard Operating Procedure* explores how digital media newly problematize the well-established epistemological crisis regarding history and photography.

Standard Operating Procedure's preoccupation with mediation has been misunderstood and maligned by critics as irresponsible, self-indulgent filmmaking, but in fact it contributes to a longstanding debate in documentary film about the truth value and communicative capacity of the image, a debate that in recent years has seen many epistemologically inclined documentaries accused of fatalism and self-indulgence. Linda Williams labeled this generic trend "the New Documentary" in 1993, challenging critics to look beyond such films' "self-reflexivity and flamboyant auteurism" to "their remarkable engagement with a newer, more contingent, relative, postmodern truth—a truth which, far from being abandoned, still operates powerfully as the receding horizon of the documentary tradition."[4] As Williams



Abu Ghraib mediated

Standard Operating Procedure. © 2008 Sony Pictures Inc. and Participant Productions LLC. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

points out, the emergence of the New Documentary in the early 1990s was coextensive with the rise of digital photography and graphics editing, and thus different in scope and skepticism from seemingly similar anxieties Alain Resnais raised almost forty years earlier. In his documentary *Night and Fog* (1955), Resnais grapples with unidentified photographs of Holocaust atrocities and asks, "Who does know anything? The reality of these camps, despised by those who built them and unfathomable to those who endured them —what hope do we have of truly capturing their reality?" Resnais's questions in many ways predict the epistemological crisis that preoccupies the New Documentary—what Williams calls its "loss of faith in the objectivity [or indexicality] of the image"—but *Standard Operating Procedure* asks how digital image capture changes what we can learn from a photograph. It wants to ponder how we come to know things about digital photography and how we expect this new medium to resolve our old uncertainties. *Standard Operating Procedure* thus positions its viewer to regard the Abu Ghraib photographs as multivalent fragments that occasion multiple stories rather than telling the whole story.

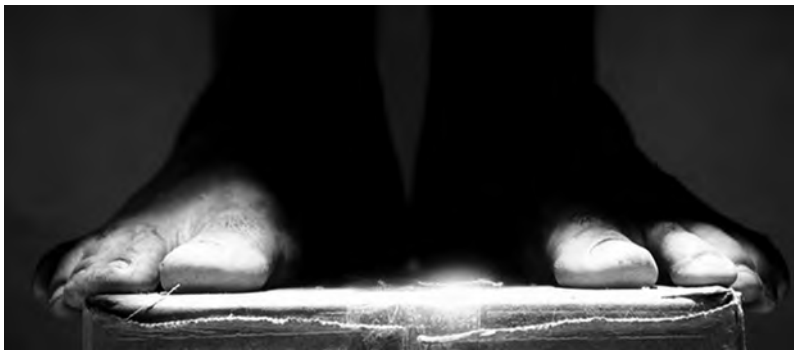
In that regard, *Standard Operating Procedure* pursues a project very different from that of other Iraq War documentaries. Those films typically seek to report journalistically on the terrible offenses and injustices the U.S. perpetrated during its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. In their approaches, they range from Alex Gibney's *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007), which interviews torture victims and philosophers to condemn U.S. violations of the Geneva Convention, to *Gunner Palace* (Michael Tucker and Petra Epperlein, 2004), an embedded

exploration of the lives of a U.S. Army artillery division as it patrols the streets of Baghdad. These movies use their media to expose atrocities; *Standard Operating Procedure* focuses on how atrocities become media files. Morris's film asserts that although the abuse at Abu Ghraib is undeniably terrible and true, the photographs neither speak directly to us nor offer transparent access to the events. The photographs are insufficient and require interpretation from viewers, who may bring external impressions and motivations to the task.

Standard Operating Procedure tries to communicate this problem by focusing on how mediation, and digital mediation in particular, disorients rather than facilitates our processes of interpretation. Crucial here is Morris's patent-pending Interrotron camera, which displays his video image on a teleprompter in front of the camera's lens. This arrangement encourages Morris's interviewees to look straight at him (and the camera) while they talk, which means that they also make "direct" eye contact with their future viewers. This effect arguably encourages the viewer to mistake direct eye contact for direct access to the truth, especially because Morris never analyzes his Interrotron technique in his films. This disingenuousness has left Morris open to charges that he is overly enamored of his own technical prowess, that he—intentionally or not—mystifies his interview process. However, *Standard Operating Procedure* actually uses the Interrotron's first-person architecture to destabilize our faith in documentary transparency. Close attention to the film's editing suggests that *Standard Operating Procedure* values the Interrotron for its ability to debunk the viewer's faith that that any photographs (including the Abu Ghraib photographs) ever speak directly to her. This self-critique is perhaps most obvious during Morris's conversation with Military Intelligence Specialist Roman Krol, which begins with Krol peering into the camera lens to analyze a picture of himself and several other soldiers throwing water and Nerf balls at detainees. Krol's scrutinizing gaze highlights the role of the apparatus in the interview and reminds the viewer that his interview is both an image and an engagement with images. Krol bridges the roles of viewer and subject during his photographic analysis, thereby reminding the viewer that she and Morris's interviewees possess a similarly imperfect interpretive relationship to the Abu Ghraib photos.

Morris also uses the Interrotron's illusion of direct eye contact to reveal how the U.S. Army may have used a photograph of Military Police Specialist Sabrina Harman to cover up a murder. Morris's Interrotron allows the viewer to look directly into Harman's eyes as she tries to account for the smile and thumbs-up she flashed when Corporal Charles Graner photographed her with the body of Manadel al-Jamadi, an Iraqi detainee killed during his interrogation by unidentified U.S. government operatives. This photograph, one of the most notorious to emerge from the Abu Ghraib scandal, shows an attractive young woman literally grinning as she leans over a brutalized corpse. Like the filmic Harman, she makes direct eye contact with the camera, and her incomprehensible smile, Morris suggests, inadvertently eclipses the other, more pressing mystery in the photo, i.e. who killed al-Jamadi. Morris asks Harman to explain her smile, but she cannot, weakly hypothesizing, "whenever I would get into a photo, I never know what to do with my hands [*sic*]." This interpretive failure actually does more for *Standard Operating Procedure*'s argument about the photographs than perhaps even Morris realizes, because it effectively undermines both images' credibility as transparent evidence. Both photograph and film hold some truth—al-Jamadi really did die, and Harman really did pose with his body—but neither can show *why* the photograph was taken, what Harman was "really" thinking, or who killed al-Jamadi. Furthermore, the images' juxtaposition reminds the viewer that both are staged for the camera, and by offering these two contrasting moments of direct eye contact together, Morris seems to reconsider his own ability to master the history of Abu Ghraib. For if Morris is indeed suggesting that Harman possesses no better understanding of the woman in the photo than any other viewer, then he is also acknowledging the limits of his documentary.

It is from this interest in unreliable narration that Morris's other auteurist trademark, his reenactments, emerges in *Standard Operating Procedure*. Questions about his reenactments have dogged Morris since *The Thin Blue Line*, and both his blog and Williams's article offer excellent justifications for those early experiments—the most salient being that Morris only records *versions* of an event, and often contradictory ones at that, which should teach viewers to question the truth value of archival footage.[5] In the case of *Standard Operating Procedure*, however, Morris reinvents the technique, pushing it beyond the pragmatic restaging of an event to something more like a dramatization: thus it would be more accurate to say that Morris stages imagined details from an event. When Harman tells the story of Gilligan, the MPs' sobriquet for the "hooded man" they forced to balance on a box under the threat of electrocution, Morris illustrates her story with extreme close-ups of an actor's toes, fingers, and hood. These shots provide a glossy, almost hyper-real resolution that consumer-grade digital cameras cannot. Yet at the same time that they frame the human detail of Gilligan's tortured body, these scenes also dramatize his mythologization. In the Gilligan episodes, the actor playing Gilligan does not move



Standard Operating Procedure. © 2008 Sony Pictures Inc. and Participant Productions LLC. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

even as the movement of inanimate objects around him affirms that he is part of a motion picture. His stillness emphasizes the imagination at work in these scenes; surely the real Gilligan's arms must have been shaking, his ankles wobbling, but we will never know. We can imagine the details of what was done to him at Abu Ghraib, but we will never be able to witness it.

Some critics object to the mannerism of Morris's dramatizations, and particularly to the fact that they are beautiful—not just poignant, as when a frightened policewoman tosses her milkshake out of a car window in *The Thin Blue Line*, or ethically harrowing, as when an historic revisionist appears to chip away chunks of Auschwitz in *Mr. Death: The Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter, Jr.* (1999). *Standard Operating Procedure* gives its viewer time to appreciate the way the dust motes circulate around Gilligan's sensory-deprivation hood. It lingers on the golden skin of a man's back as MPs pull him from an isolation cell on a leash and the way water sparkles as it pours out of a showerhead during a mock-waterboarding scene. These images are all well-lit, exquisitely composed, and elegantly processed—and they do lead one to wonder why Morris would seek beauty in Abu Ghraib.

One way of getting at this question might be to contrast Morris's highly aestheticized dramatization with the archival footage featured in *Taxi to the Dark Side*. That film repeatedly deploys news footage of American soldiers rounding up detainees in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as tapes of the U.S. Congressional investigation of Abu Ghraib, Vice President Cheney's "Dark Side" interview on *Meet the Press*, and even one of John McCain's POW films from Vietnam. These scenes contextualize, and some, particularly Senator McCain's, even haunt. They do not invite questions, however; they do not make us uncertain about what we know or how we read them. Morris's dramatizations, on the other hand, emphasize a showmanship which may in fact be inherent, even when it is not acknowledged, in all documentary reconstructions. So whereas *Taxi to the Dark Side*'s archival footage tells the viewer what happened, Morris's dramatizations remind their viewer that often the past can only be staged, not shown. The waterboarding shot provides a particularly illustrative example of this, because it recreates a point of view that by definition never existed. Waterboarding requires placing a bag or hood over the victim's head, thus obscuring his or her vision of the descending water. Yet this is the same obscured perspective *Standard Operating Procedure* adopts during its waterboarding scene. The scene literalizes a purely empathic point of view, to demonstrate what we imagine or what we think we can surmise about one particular torture the U.S. military inflicts on its detainees. Morris's restaging emphasizes its own constructedness; it warns us not to mistake it for anything other than a version of events that are essentially inaccessible.

Framing the Abu Ghraib photographs as multideterminate and elusive also enables *Standard Operating Procedure* to foreground the new problems digital media pose for photographic epistemology. The film articulates this concern through its focus on Special Agent Brent Pack, the military investigator charged with sorting and analyzing the 12,000 digital photos collected at Abu Ghraib. The Army tasked Pack with looking at the metadata in each photograph to ascertain when it was taken and by what camera, so as to determine how long certain incidents lasted, how much "effort" the MPs put into their treatment of the detainees, and whether a given interaction constituted a violation of military protocol or "standard operating procedure." Pack's job authorized him to plumb only digital—not human or historical—depths; he could look inside a photo for its metadata but could not read anything into the faces of its subjects or infer causal relationships. Morris uses CGI to illustrate the irony of this process, literally dissolving the Abu Ghraib photos into streams of binary code that finally render their contents invisible. Morris thus dramatizes the sleight of hand by which the Army substituted mystification for interpretation and effectively exploited a wider cultural suspicion that digital images hold more than they show. For whereas films like *Blowup* (1966) and *Blade Runner* (1982) have imagined fantastic levels of detail emerging from analog images, today television programs like *NCIS* and *CSI* suggest that digital photographs can be made to confess extra-visual secrets. In these police-procedural shows, forensic investigators blow up digital images and find, instead of pixels, previously invisible information hiding inside the image, including contextualizing intelligence that as often as not renders the content of the photograph almost superfluous. In the case of the Abu Ghraib photos, this sort of metadata analysis helped the Army obscure the chain of command behind each incident.

Pack's investigation thus points up the political necessity of *Standard Operating Procedure*'s epistemological inquiry into the digital photographs from Abu Ghraib. The military investigation enlisted the intricacies of digital analysis in order to close down political interpretation; by reducing torture to metadata, it attempted to redirect the thorny question of culpability. *Standard Operating Procedure*'s focus on digitality by contrast opens up the problem of interpretation, acknowledging an anxiety about the reliability of computer data. Instead of echoing *CSI*, Morris's treatment of digital evidence undermines our learned faith in the verisimilitude

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit,
"Rohmer's Salon"

of photography with an anxiety about the computer's ability to outsmart us. Many fiction films feature computers that know better than we do (to our detriment): *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Demon Seed* (1977), *Alien* (1979), *The Matrix* (1999), and *Resident Evil* (2002), to name just a few. The generic and qualitative range of films about malignant computers suggests the symptomatic repetition of a fear that computers may be robbing us of our agency, bodies, and perceptual capacities. This fear is a correlative response to modes of visual representation that are no longer indexical of a profilmic world. As D. N. Rodowick explains, "what remains absent from the process of digital representation is what thinkers like André Bazin and Roland Barthes held fundamental to the photographic image: its causal force as a literal spatial and temporal molding of the originating event."[6] Rodowick suggests that digital image capture actually resembles painting more than photography because it is a *representation* of the world rather than a trace. Because digital photographs "quantify" rather than transcribe events, a digital photo like "a painted portrait is a representation in which the artist makes a likeness, after his or her own vision of the subject represented."[7]

For that reason, paintings and digital photographs can inspire similar questions about accuracy, artistic license, and interpretation, and this is why *Standard Operating Procedure* insists on the mannerism for which it has been so sharply criticized. The (digital) dramatizations in *Standard Operating Procedure* oblige their viewer to question the verisimilitude of digital photography. Their banal beauty, like the sheer volume of Abu Ghraib photos, suggests that digital photography can render almost any moment worthy of record, but their extremely tight framing also reminds the viewer that not every moment worthy of scrutiny is necessarily captured. We want the Abu Ghraib images to provide sufficient truth, in other words, but they cannot. Morris's dramatizations affirm that the Abu Ghraib photos, despite all their metadata, may still be missing crucial details, that their relationship to history is still tenuous and representational. Furthermore, the Abu Ghraib photographs are also based in showmanship, or representing a world for an audience. In a sense, therefore, the lesson of Morris's film is that the Abu Ghraib photos are actually more like his imaginative, mannerist restagings than we might at first suspect.

Thus the goal of *Standard Operating Procedure* is not to uncover the "real story" behind the Abu Ghraib scandal but to understand what the photographs have meant to us and why they remain so multivalent, such an open wound. For that reason, Morris does not rehearse the scandal's chronology, the Army's internal investigation, or the sentences meted out to various soldiers. Instead of official history or journalism, *Standard Operating Procedure* privileges the equivocations and explanations of the various "bad apples" as it thinks about everything we ask digital photographs to do for us, and the ways we fear they may deceive us. Given that emphasis, this reviewer left the film neither outraged nor confused—just sad, and in touch with the futility of that sadness. *Standard Operating Procedure* thus resembles one of the most moving panels in the AIDS memorial quilt, a relatively unadorned white rectangle that warns, "Don't think that by crying over this, you've really done something for AIDS." From its digital evocation of the sheer multiplicity of Abu Ghraib photos to the seemingly endless chain of explanations it documents, *Standard Operating Procedure* argues that we will never master what happened at Abu Ghraib.

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ABSTRACT Errol Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure* offers the U.S. soldiers accused of detainee abuse at the Abu Ghraib military prison in Iraq a forum in which to give accounts of their infamous photographs. However, the vexing digitality of those images foregrounds the role of interpretation in the construction of visual evidence.

KEYWORDS *Standard Operating Procedure*, documentary, Errol Morris, Abu Ghraib, digital photography

DVD DATA *Standard Operating Procedure*. Director: Errol Morris. © 2008 Sony Pictures Classics Inc. and Participant Productions LLC. Publisher: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. $19.94, 1 disc.

DIGITAL FATIGUE: IMAGING WAR IN RECENT AMERICAN FILM

GARRETT STEWART ANALYZES HOW POLITICS AND TECHNOLOGY INSISTENTLY COMBINE IN CINEMATIC ACCOUNTS OF THE "WAR ON TERROR"

"Don't look at the camera! Just go by like you're fighting," barks Francis Ford Coppola in a cameo role as a TV journalist in *Apocalypse Now*. Announces Marlon Brando as Kurtz later in the film: "Horror and moral terror are your friends. If they are not then they are enemies to be feared." We've come a long way from the cinematic ironies of Vietnam's greatest film treatment. En route to the latest Iraq war narratives, we've in fact passed recently through a scene in *Jarhead* in which marine recruits are whipped into a frenzy for the first Gulf War by a screening of the helicopter juggernaut from Coppola's epic. The allusion is rounded out later in Kuwait—in the period before digital camcorders or cell-phone video—when some of the soldiers give cautious on-camera interviews to a network journalist about their feelings for the mission.

The next irreversible stage in this development is again technological as well as political. In screen narratives of the second Desert Storm, where American military power comes down on both sides of Kurtz's alternative, a personified Terror is now the stated U.S. enemy. And it is the military that is busy filming *itself* at every turn, from high-altitude surveillance transmits to video diaries and cell-phone souvenirs. While seizing on these linked aspects of current Mideast violence, ideological and optical, American films about Iraq or Afghanistan keep failing at the box office. We're told in the press it's too close for comfort, too soon for analysis, too much like free TV to warrant ticket prices. The real problem is that it's too shapeless for plot. Fighting terror with terror is one thing; finding narrative drive or closure for the confrontation, let alone some modicum of catharsis, is another. To say nothing of a formal coherence taut enough to secure a cogent oppositional stance. Instead, the frequent anti-war burden of these films feels like stress only in the other sense, disorienting and demoralized—especially when the most salient formal feature, the blanketing of plot by a thick quilt of digital mediation, seems part of a diagnosed syndrome to begin with, where every tour of duty comes equipped with tourist cams and every other move is shot from above in someone else's movie. Battle fatigue has grown stylistic, afflicting the picturing as well as its scene.

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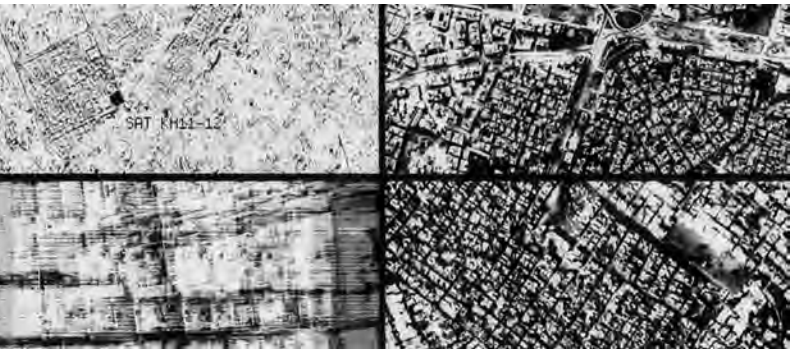
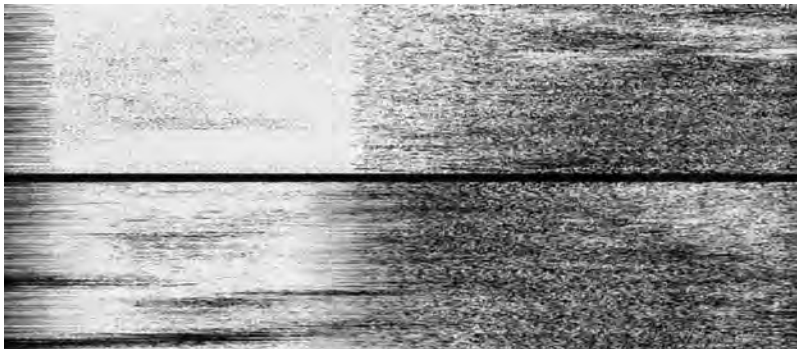
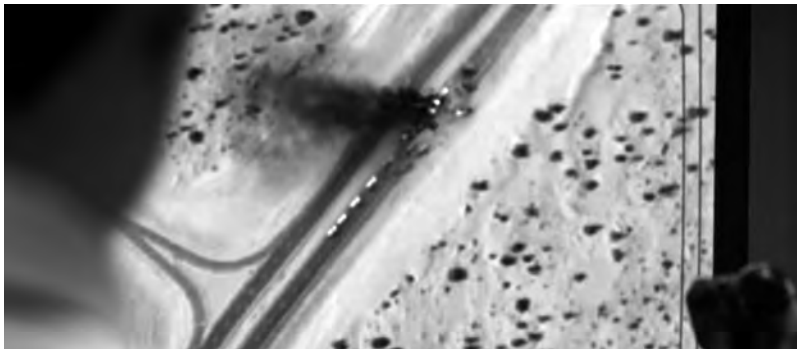
IN HARM'S SWAY: PLOT UNDER SIEGE

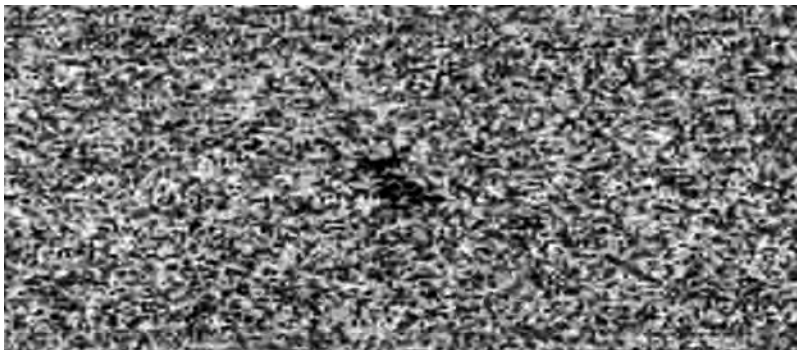
The original "shock and awe" was a war-film idea, the imperialist vestige of a genre fantasy, where part of the U.S. arsenal was the very spectacle of its unleashed power. What remains, and for the U.S. troops as well now, is a paranoid setting without a vivid scenario, a genre template left begging for the energies of plot. With no clear demarcation between the good guys and the bad, narrative itself seems stalled, balked. We found no WMDs in Iraq, just IEDs detonating everywhere. Strong storytelling is among the casualties of such "improvised" devices. Gone are the choreographed and panoramic staples of the combat genre, beachheads to be won, fortresses held. We get instead random checkpoint suicides, grenade and mortar ambushes in blind alleys, frantic house searches, impromptu firefights—all of it saturated by video: not only second-hand embedded footage but the ubiquitous remote control of drone predator surveillance in the high-tech fantasy of an ultimately unmanned victory.

To think of this in the more openly paradoxical terms of an unmanned heroics is to see the genre problem at once, where the damage is inflicted not just on characters but on plot. Narrative agency is subsumed to technology at every level, from aerial tracking, where characters are just faceless pawns on a monitoring grid, to eye-level confrontations, where any human posture toward an encroaching violence, from suspense to panic, often feels as virtual, as permeated by mediation, as computer interactivity in some low-resolution videogame. For the soldier to *see action* in this context is more like an ocular than a military idiom. In a vocabulary equally familiar to such high-tech video transmissions, the very programming of a genre, even an anti-war genre, may









War machine as mediated spectacle, genre crash and digital disintegration

Top four: *Body of Lies*. © 2008 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. DVD: Warner Home Video (U.K.). Next two: *Syriana*. © 2005 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. DVD: Warner Home Video (U.K.).
Bottom two: *Lions for Lambs*. © 2007 United Artists Production Finance LLC. DVD: MGM Entertainment (U.K.).

seem to have crashed—and in part from electronic overload at the plot level itself.

The visible features of this collapse are rampant in the mandatory but hackneyed techniques of digital intervention, where the crisis, decidedly macro as well as micro, shows itself now in tactical reconnaissance views, now in private camcorder files, each disembodied and impassive—with the space between, in this asymmetric warfare, filled mostly by death. If Vietnam was the "TV War," our occupation of Iraq is instead a video and laptop war, not only logged but at times waged by digital relays, with cell phones as well as infrared predator screens helping to trigger the same bombs whose carnage they may also record. In film versions of this conflict, narrative stalemate is thus matched, rather than overcome, by the inevitable and increasingly stale kinetics of its visual treatment. Not just a stylistic tic but a political symptom, these verité effects are a common denominator easy to lose sight of in the more obvious deadlocks of plotting, even though much of the blockage to narrative drive is in fact regularly located, framed, and diagnosed by just this compulsive optical—rather than ideological—mediation. With no genre formats to count on, these narratives can only project a visual "look," where the graininess of the image, infrared or video, must stand in for the true grittiness of the mission. Without clear lines drawn in the sand, there is only dust on the nervous handheld lens.

Alongside plots openly concerned with capturing enemy images as often as combatants (*The Battle for Haditha*, *Redacted*, *The Situation*), there are storylines turning on CIA operatives at their keypads, monitors, and cell phones in rapid alternation with agents in the field (*Body of Lies*, *The Kingdom*, *Rendition*). Regular intercutting from strategic control centers to war zones is stretched at times, beyond the immediate span of telecommunication, to full-blown parallel editing across hemispheric distances (*Lions for Lambs*, *Syriana*) in what amounts to a geopolitics of montage. In this obsessive nest of mediations, top-down but also bottom-out, one mode of digital registration is strategic, offensive, potentially ballistic, keeping a latent victim in its remote cross hairs; the other implements a psychic defense mechanism. One is coolly removed by default in aerial surveillance; the other tries to impose a related degree of separation, up-close but impersonal, between bodily violence and its recorded impact. The line between reconnaissance and cognition itself can become as blurred as the images that would sometimes seek to bridge it.

Both modes of mediation, stratospheric and atmospheric, from bombs on automatic pilot to videocam headsets, have direct consequences for the main armatures of narrative in plot and character, omniscience and subjectivity. Where we expect an encompassing narrative overview, the proverbial big picture, we get only robot scans, objective, uneditorialized. Where we expect the raw drama of combat and its private tolls, we get violence, suffering, and its counterassaults, buffered everywhere by autofocus viewfinders. These Iraq plots can thus be seen struggling to cohere within the intersecting spheres of two broader cinematic kinds: the traditional war (or anti-war) film, and the new Hollywood plots of surveillance paranoia, in overseas and homeland settings alike. This dubious overlap is the gray area, and increasingly the no man's land, between military action and the deeply mixed message of high-tech technophobia. And the overlap can become in itself a double bind, formal as well as geopolitical, so that a considered recoil from strategic disaster or human atrocity is hard to sustain. Critique dissipates into technique. In the new digital milieu, anything approaching to oppositional cinema in a realist combat mode risks being thwarted by the requisite authenticities of its own visualization.

The genuine anti-war film requires of cinema some special work of witness. *Apocalypse Now* wanted to suggest, of course, that although you think you've seen it on TV, you've never seen it like this. You had to have been there, and 70mm is the next best thing. That's the gesture of epic reconstruction that survives even the baroque allegorical hyperbole of the Kurtz plot. Nearly half a decade after the Indochina cease-fire, film could at last give us new eyes for the unthinkable. Retrospection is invaluable, but also needed is another kind of distance, technical rather than historical: a stylistic

FILM DATA

Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)
Badland (Francesco Lucente, 2007)
The Battle for Haditha (Nick Broomfield, 2007)
Body of Lies (Ridley Scott, 2008)
Home of the Brave (Irwin Winkler, 2006)
In the Valley of Elah (Paul Haggis, 2007)
Jarhead (Sam Mendes, 2005)
The Kingdom (Peter Berg, 2007)
Lions for Lambs (Robert Redford, 2007)
Redacted (Brian De Palma, 2007)
Rendition (Gavin Hood, 2007)
The Situation (Philip Haas, 2006)
Stop-Loss (Kimberly Peirce, 2008)
Syriana (Stephen Gaghan, 2005)
Vantage Point (Pete Travis, 2008)

distance lately telescoped or vanished altogether in the new Iraq regime of participant record.

The fact that the U.S. is still in the thick of the Mideast killing isn't all that prevents a clear ethical and political perspective, then. On top of this, indeed layered directly over it, the continuous video traces of such violence within plot leave next to no space for the visual rhetoric of exposé. In analytic as well as digital terms, there's no exposure time, no lag for ironic or polemical reframing. There's only the electronic tracking of terror moment by moment. The legacy of oppositional cinema, and its leverage, is in large part forfeited by just this relentless instantaneous videography. Here, then, is where ethics and media ethos, politics and style, are impossible to separate. Sure, you may think you've seen it all on YouTube and cable networks, and this time you'd be right, you have: seen it the way the military itself has, at both ends of a lethal stealth—aerial hits and surface ambushes alike—each recorded in the real time of pending annihilation, zoom versus pan, impersonal targeting over against the jittery focus of patrol.

Moreover, it is through just this convergent battery of imaging that the war is subsequently "brought home"—for deliberate video replay as "war porn" on veteran laptops and TV monitors as well as in the shattering form of unwanted memory traces. As part two of an opening desert scenario, or alternately as an attempted genre all its own, the returning-vet films, even without the surveillance cutaways of combat plots, still borrow the contrapuntal techniques of war-zone intercutting: no longer between command central and life (or death) on the ground, but now between lethal intensities in the desert and their brain-injured return from the midst of emotional desertion back home. And if this brand of montage is no longer exactly geopolitical in an overt disjunction between center and periphery, or between satellite omniscience and single agency, it remains the marker of an ethical as well as psychic dissociation. In this vein there are films whose editing disjunctively crosses the emotional fissures of stress disorder between traumatic flashbacks (often via replayed combat video) and a failed acclimation (let alone a hero's acclaim) in stateside return (*In the Valley of Elah*, *Badland*), as well as those plots that further alternate (via camcorder flashbacks) between separate ordeals of reassimilation among a loosely knit cast of returning soldiers (*Home of the Brave*, *Stop-Loss*), thus widening the national map of no return. But before any such overview of domestic disintegration, an implacable surveillance overseas. Before the perils of introspection, the war machine as mediated spectacle—where action is repeatedly trapped, and plot curtailed, in the lenses of a power whose flip side is the impotence of being all-seen.

ROBOTICS/SURVEILLANCE/OMNISCIENCE

The panoptic model derives, of course, from the idea of a central point of view circumscribing all visible space under a mobile and pinioning gaze. It is easy to see why this can become a paradigm for omniscient narrative itself. By contrast, the new global mechanics of spy-cams, orbital or otherwise mobile in the first place, lets the peopled world roll past under its totalized purview even while arranging for the local vantage of electronic targeting. This pattern is evident again in the latest commercial disappointment among these frequently combined war and espionage films, Ridley Scott's *Body of Lies*. For all its star ammunition, there is no heroic narrative to load. The film's Mideast plot ends where it began, with blurry satellite images of the espied. In a prologue located by intertitle in "Manchester, England," the first shot is of an incendiary videotape playing on the TV screen of a terrorist cell: a Muslim cleric inciting the jihadist cadre to "revenge the American war on the Muslim world." As they do moments later: by exploding themselves along with half a residential block when the counterterror forces are heard moving in. In a sudden shift of perspective from shaky action footage to a delayed establishing shot, this is a blast we see only by way of an aerial surveillance image that fades quickly to black.

From there we cut, via intertitle again, to "Samarra, Iraq"—for another urban aerial shot—before zeroing in on the hero at the onset of an espionage plot that returns finally, but with no real finish, to this remote omniscience. In between, and tracked at every turn by cell-phone transmissions between the CIA strategist, Hoffman (Russell Crowe), and his field operative, Ferris (Leonardo DiCaprio), what transpires is a counterinsurgency scheme of such weird ingenuity that it begins to feel more like a metaphor for business as usual than a surgical strike against it. What comes to pass is another endangering of narrative itself, so that the extreme complications of the plot seem to collapse under their own weight as a foregone conclusion. U.S. military presence in the Mideast spawns rather than quells anti-American violence. Preemptive measures serve only to escalate what they would placate. Sound familiar? It's certainly a premise that has found narrative manifestation before. But what if the CIA did more than passively accept the disaster of America's counterproductive presence in Iraq by actually staging its fallout in the breeding ground of jihadist cells? What, that is, if counterinsurgency took the form of counterfeit terrorism in a fabricated parallel universe designed to draw from hiding a leading Al-Qaeda figure jealous of his fictive counterpart?

When this coded version of America's self-inflicted setbacks in the region actually succeeds in smoking out the

Webcam witness, instantaneous videography

Top two: *Rendition*. © 2007 New Line Productions Inc. DVD: Entertainment in Video (U.K.). Next two: *Vantage Point*. © 2008 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc./GH Three LLC. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (U.K.).
Bottom four: *Stop-Loss*. © 2007 Paramount Pictures Corporation. DVD: Paramount Home Entertainment (U.K.).

ruthless Al-Qaeda mastermind, his apprehension is rushed and anticlimactic. He's simply whisked away in an unmarked car. Cornering one more bloodthirsty zealot doesn't much matter anymore, at least for narrative design. As if to confirm that "spying" has no endgame in this new theater of war, the movie whose Iraq segment began in transition from the overhead sighting of the Manchester blast to a panoptic scan of the Samarra cityscape—with its own brewing violence—now closes with the truncation of a continuing electronic reconnaissance directed again at its own agent. More than once before, Ferris has strained skyward to catch a glint of sunlight off the otherwise invisible predator drones. Toward the end, too, our star well knows he's still "on screen." Ridley Scott's long final shot borrows much of its unsettling effect by allusion to an earlier film of CIA treachery. In *Syriana*, it is another renegade U.S. agent who is sacrificed in the end as collateral damage in the robot-controlled bombing of an upstart Saudi prince willing to negotiate oil deals with the Chinese, where the assassination is both registered and executed on the targeting grid of a video relay at CIA headquarters.

The comparable last satellite perspective of *Body of Lies* seems meant to make us equally nervous for its defecting hero—until it dismisses him as expendable only in the everyday bureaucratic sense. Sick of CIA double-dealing, taken with the Mideast and a local nurse to boot, Ferris has refused his promotion to a Washington desk job and resigned from the Agency. The last image peters out while tracking him by remote control as he wanders between the tents of a Jordanian bazaar, until Hoffman answers an off-screen technician's "Are we staying with him?" in the negative: "Buddy's alone—he's all by himself." Privacy can be won only by a flight from the corporate eye. "Copy that . . . Clearing off target." To have been seen is admittedly to have been locked all along in the gunsights of power.

With our dropout hero fallen beneath the radar, cancelled voyeurism is the closest thing to narrative resolution—at least when there's no fuller picture to be had, no rectifying new perspective as well as no further "agency" for any protagonist to serve. Yet it is our own full-frame, 35mm image that suffers a last digital fritz and breakdown on exit, film devolved in passing to the digital. This ocular conceit is not only an obvious technical deceit, but a further rhetorical turn. To compensate for any lack of satisfying climax, at least we've supposedly been privy to some top-secret CIA feeds, for once seeing the world they way they do. And not, of course, just visually. For at a certain level of geopolitical oversight—to whose plotting our hero (any hero) is no longer instrumental—all monitored enemy activity, whether or not we foment or even fabricate it, can be made to serve our purposes. A film doesn't have to be even half good to be fleetingly brilliant, which is not to say popular, when it lets American imperialist logic declare itself so nakedly.

Lions for Lambs, otherwise talky and obvious, has one gripping visual moment in the same surveillance vein. In the overseas sector of its multi-plot structure, two idealistic army recruits are downed and surrounded on an Afghan mountaintop in an aborted helicopter strike. By a sustained irony of scale, the encircling Taliban are kept at bay for as long as possible by the strafings of smart bombs monitored from command central. But not smart enough. When time runs out, the doomed soldiers must at last face the enemy gunmen across real rather than mediated space. At which point we cut away—to robot transmits on the mission-control screens—for the guttering infrared glow of the two fallen bodies in the cessation of all movement. In retrospect, and beyond its grueling exposure of war's new asymmetric destruction, the fatal time lag of those remote-controlled bombings seems all but allegorical. It is already too late for decisive high-tech (and high-altitude) interventions in this war of ideologies. There is no position left that stands above it all, none that can call all the shots.

SCOPED OUT

In the absence of any decisive political rather than optic overview, we have, besides the self-inspection by continuous video imaging among soldiers on the ground, also the ad hoc tactics of low-level digital surveillance by anti-terrorist bureaucrats at their Mideast desks. The disjointed perspective that results can skew whole plots, as with counterterror films like *Rendition* or even the more traditional action thriller *Vantage Point*, where in each case temporal replay, despite its more or less obvious electronic models, is ultimately a narrative figure rather than a technological function.

In *Rendition*, after an opening suicide bombing in a North African square, the CIA orders the "extreme rendition" of a suspected collaborator. He is soon subjected to waterboarding by the local chief of police, whose investigation of the attack has so far gone nowhere. A tourist camcorder recovered from the blast has shown a woman approaching the bomb-strapped terrorist, but, even after repeated scannings of the video, she can't be identified—and offers no clues. A week later, the police chief's daughter, eloped in the meantime with a young jihadist, discovers a plot to kill her father in revenge for his brutal methods. When she races to intercept this vendetta, she enters upon the same scene the film began with, where our sudden flash

of recognition (literalized by a brief transitional white-out of the full-screen image) reveals her as the already recorded first victim of the blast. With this drastic time loop, the pace of the trick ending goes into mordant slow motion just before her lover's detonation. The film's temporal (turned historical) irony compounds itself. If all such violence is a continuous repetition anyway, witnessing has no purchase. And yet what we do see by narrative's own structural emblem is that the sins of the father have already been visited upon the next generation.

Usually, of course, digital surveillance and image manipulation are represented *within* the plot rather than, as with the temporal rewind of *Rendition*, foisted upon it by blunt narrative license (in sliding association there with that forensic camcorder replay). As if intuiting this, most of the Iraq movies are preoccupied with low-altitude and hands-on imaging, even when enhanced by telephoto or night-vision lenses. Brian de Palma's "docudrama" of a particularly brutal Iraq incident, *Redacted*, exploits this technique of optical processing almost to the point of manic travesty, where the only mission with any focus has become transmission itself.[1] The narrative begins with live video footage at an Iraq checkpoint, over-voiced on the camcorder of a recruit, Salazar (Izzy Diaz), hoping to parlay his harrowing images into film-school admission after his tour of duty. His recurrent digital diary alternates from there on with an interpolated French documentary, embedded journalistic footage, Internet posts on both jihadist and American protest websites, Al Jazeera news broadcasts, incriminating surveillance videos from fixed camera positions on the base, and then, after one of his buddies is blown apart by an IED, more of his camcorder views of the squad's rape-and-murder revenge spree, the victims' bodies finally burned beyond recognition off-camera. From there we move to a twin-screen laptop video chat between the tormented officer who didn't try hard enough to stop the violence and his lawyer father back home, urging him to keep a lid on it.

In this crossfire of total visual transcription, Salazar alludes to Godard by promising on-camera that his digital diary will guarantee "truth 24 times a second, 24/7," a boast made just before he is kidnapped from in front of his own tripod by masked Al-Qaeda henchmen and soon executed on-camera: the talking head become a severed one. All that can impede this voracious mediation is, in the narrative's very last shot, the digital freeze on the victim's former squad leader fighting back tears as he reluctantly has his picture taken at a homecoming party. His own metaphors for an ineradicable guilt have in fact just rehearsed the very evolution of optical media from photochemical to digital imprint, those searing "snapshots" of rape, murder, and immolation being forever "burned into my brain."

The escalating violence of *Redacted*, barely aspiring to a plot at all, brakes to a halt where many of the homecoming films begin, even as they get no farther by way of story than the lingering diagnosis of mental lesions and emotional paralysis. One film promises otherwise for much of its length. *Stop-Loss* tracks a discharged vet, King (Ryan Phillippe), whose justified legal outrage over enforced reenlistment (the "Stop-loss" program) forces him to go AWOL. At the end, under cover of darkness, he is about to become a "ghost" by crossing illegally into Mexico—a Homeland Security paranoia in reverse—but recommits instead to the ongoing transgression of another foreign border. For we suddenly cut (a shock cut in every sense) to a roll call of the enlisted in broad daylight—as if he's seen the light at last in filing silently onto the army bus for a return to Iraq. Better a corpse than a living ghost. Optical technique is now left, all on its own, to round off the plot as a vicious circle.

The film began, just before a last deadly mission in Iraq, with King's buddies toasting their pending discharge with a handmade video of the sort frequently posted on YouTube and said by the director to have inspired the visual design of the film. These images are soon followed by a grim funeral montage in memory of the subsequently fallen. This is just the sort of personal videolog that the returned vets gather drunk to rescreen on a laptop after they've aimlessly resumed their civilian lives. They can't get the war movie out of their heads. Even earlier, the transition from the last round of Iraq violence to a homecoming parade in Texas is negotiated in King's mind by full-screen memories of those obituary videos hastily edited together in the desert, whose engulfing silent images drown out at first the patriotic cheers of welcome. Here we see again that recurrent device of traumatic recurrence itself: flashback as digital playback.[2]

And if the medium can deliver in this way at least some measure of oppositional energy, so, too, is the political capitulation of the film's ending at least somewhat mitigated. Despite its ethics of renewed duty, the whole closing sequence, with families tearfully waving goodbye, floats past in slightly slowed motion. The film seems sleepwalking through its own worst nightmare of redeployment—again, as in *Rendition*, the pace of ceaseless repetition, no end in sight. The almost subliminal retardation of this last sequence hints less at a ritual solemnity than at a mechanical treadmill of recycled bodies, elegiac before the fact: the true loss there is no stopping. Where mourning is involved at this scale, visual effects don't need to be full-blown ideas, let alone subversive intentions, to help in thinking things through.

An ethics of clarified vision, posthumous reverse shot

Top six: *In the Valley of Elah*. © 2007 Elah Finance VOF. DVD: Optimum Home Entertainment (U.K.). Bottom two: *The Situation*. © 2006 Red Wine Pictures LLC. DVD: New Video Group.

LOOKING WITH OTHER EYES

This is certainly evident in another multi-plot diagnosis of cross-wired intrigue in Iraq, *The Situation*, which arrives at its climax in a moment of stark optical rather than diplomatic mediation. After he is gunned down by accident in an anti-insurgent raid, the last act of an Iraqi photojournalist smitten with the American reporter heroine is to snap off—almost by a pun on reflex action—a half-dozen spasmodic shots of her, marked by shutter clicks on the soundtrack, as she bends over his mangled body. These stored images are only noticed by her in the LCD preview screen in the film's last scene: a series of increasing close-ups—as if in a decomposed strip of live motion—as she once knelt toward his virtual corpse along a truncated vector of contact. Stressed by this ironic deferral of standard filmic intercutting, so that she has become in effect his posthumous reverse shot, what we sense is that the best any American—or any reporter—could do in an occupied Iraq is to see one's presence in the eyes of the other.

The Situation activates in that closing moment yet another conversion of unexpected plotting into political irony, as we saw at a more encompassing narrative scale with the CIA-generated terror cell in *Body of Lies*. There, anti-American violence came to be simulated by the Americans themselves. A similar vein of displaced aggression is evident in the narrative false lead of another and stronger film. U.S. soldiers perpetrate a collective act of violent reprisal in a bleak border zone between military and civilian authority: the stabbing and burning of a defenseless victim, and the butchering of the body before the hasty burial of its remains in the desert sands (where they are later unearthed only as dismembered, charred bones). No, this isn't a version of the real-life and real-death events in Iraq that triggered de Palma's *Redacted*, with the repeated penetration of the innocent victim before slaying her and burning her corpse. As the withheld, shocking, and in fact dislocated revelation of *In the Valley of Elah*, it is not a case of interracial rape and mayhem this time, but another kind of pent-up violence: the pointless homeland murder, by repeated knife wounds, of a returning vet by a drunken member of his squad, followed by its hideously literal cover-up in the New Mexico dirt, just on the invisible dividing line between military property and the beat of the local police. In every sense, the dream of repatriation is dead on arrival.

When Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones), father of the missing soldier, a vet and former military police detective himself, first goes into action, however, we for once, with the facts still held back from us, seem caught up in a real genre plot. But when this detective thriller has its mounting suspicions of criminal U.S. behavior in the Mideast confirmed instead in the American West, it is again an uprush of mediated images that keys the shift from factual disclosure to deflected recognition. At the outset, Deerfield thinks he'll find clues on the cell phone he confiscates from his son's barrack room, but what he retrieves are for the most part "unstable" and "degraded" shots of violence, torture, and panic in Iraq, often recorded from inside his son's armored vehicle, including one lingering, inexplicable roadside image of a young boy's body, which the investigating father prints off at one point, without explanation, on a commercial photocopier. It is only later, when he has uncovered the implausible and macabre facts of his own boy's stateside murder, that this proud veteran must own up to the causal connection between it and the contagious overseas violence

He does so only by letting the truth be *driven home to him* (at the now shared controls of abusive force). This happens when, leaving the scene of one mindless crime, he takes the wheel of his own truck only to hallucinate his way back into his son's previous violence. Suddenly the screen jumps—across flashbacks from the cell-phone images that have previously riveted him—to an inset and subjective 35mm realization of the culminating Iraq incident in his now unclouded mind's eye: the deliberate running down of someone else's innocent son in the road. You don't have to have been there. You only have to be willing to envision it, to internalize the optical record as your own inherited flashback. Deerfield becomes the ideal viewer of the movie he's in. In its whiplash exchange between then and now, us and them, that's the political charge of this climactic montage. The film that opens with a logo pretending to be a video image recovering from its digital glitches and break-ups has, two hours later, closed instead by foregrounding its inherent cinematographic power to figure an ethics of clarified vision.

Same with a stunning moment near the climax of *The Battle for Haditha* by the British documentarian Nick Broomfield, who this time fictionalizes U.S. military violence in Iraq even while using real ex-marines to improvise most of the dialogue. The high-profile news story from November of 2005: U.S. troops erupt in mass murder as revenge for a roadside bombing. The invented backstory: Al-Qaeda's role in the international videotape exposé of these American war crimes. When a bomb detonated by cell phone destroys a marine Humvee, within minutes the incensed squad launches an arbitrary counterattack on the adjacent neighborhood, killing two dozen Iraqis, many of them noncombatants, including women and children. The savagery only comes to light in the end because the insurgents who trigger the explosion and inadvertently precipitate the

Total visual transcription, ocular takedown

Top four: *Redacted*. © 2007 HDNet Films LLC. DVD: Optimum Home Entertainment (U.K.). Bottom four: *The Battle for Haditha*. © 2007 Lafayette Film. DVD: Contender (U.K.).

neighborhood rampage are instructed to "film everything" in the mass reprisal so that "the world will see what America is doing" (the obverse and complement to the jihadists' routine use of successful bombings caught on video as a terrorist recruitment tool).

And a further media twist, which torques round to a point before the bombing plot has even gotten underway. For one of the two Al-Qaeda conscripts is first introduced in the act of dispensing rather than recording images at a video store, slipping DVD porn to U.S. soldiers making their rounds at gunpoint. The truly obscene footage of this image vendor, however, will come only later: first the house-by-house camcorder record of bullet-riddled families, then his filming of their mass funeral, and finally a videotaped interview with the lone surviving child of a slain family. When jihadists leak this videolog of war crimes to *Time* magazine, for broadcast in turn on American TV ("Student Footage Reveals Marine Cover Up"), the loop of secondary mediation is fully closed. Yet there is one visual sequence that has achieved its chilling schematic power by breaking free from all the familiar optical layering dutifully remobilized here by Broomfield, everything from cross-haired rifle sightings, or the digital grids of drone scans in command-post relays, to Bush rebroadcast in a flak jacket on Arab TV as if to inflame anti-American sentiment.

Burrowing through all this at the film's violent apogee, Broomfield's ordinarily handheld camera locks in on an arresting—because eerily arrested—point of vision without audition. The build-up to this bravura shot is traced in clear cinematographic stages. The so-called "360 degree war"—where, without a real front, death can come at you from any direction—is reversed here, in the film's orgy of house-by-house retaliation, by the rotary swish pans that take in, and take out, whole rooms at a time in a single sweep of surveillance and annihilation. But at one turn in the mounting violence, the point of view is exchanged—as it so rarely is in these films—for that of an Iraqi subject at the receiving end of this line of fire. At the sound of approaching gunshots, an elderly man goes to his protective front-door peephole to "see what's happening." Through a blurry iris shot, we watch the U.S. soldiers blast open an outer gate with grenades—before cutting back to an interior side view of this incidental victim shredded through the door by machine gun fire and blown halfway across the room.

It is then that the narrative point of view suddenly cuts—and drops—to the empty space under a still-occupied bed, where only the camera has had time to hide. In this fixed, prolonged, abjected shot, during which all sound but the lugubrious orchestral score has been dialed out, we are trapped in a fixed-frame view of a pair of marine feet (the U.S. "boots on the ground") around which a rain of empty shells pelts the floor—until all motion subsides on the mattress above them. In this visualized multiple discharge of a self-defeating revenge, the true American footprint is indelibly left on the region. Probing well beyond the preceding style of faux documentary, here is a devastating optical metaphor that pits reciprocally faceless cultures against each other over the unseen middle space—and void—of death.

To get such an irony down in a single framed image is about all one can ask of any anti-terror film, as with the mediated flashback montage that closes *In the Valley of Elah*. Since the violence in Iraq has been repeatedly laid open to video transcript, a screen narrative true to the fabric of digital record and surveillance—to the regime change in media as well as military control—can't pretend to show us something otherwise unseen. But as cinema rather than webcam upload or cell-phone file or posted Internet image or infrared satellite feed, narrative film, even in default of plot solutions, can nonetheless work to show us some aspect of this bloodshed seen otherwise. And this even if, after all the violence, what we are further made to see in Broomfield's averted shot is the need at times, a need human enough, to look aside from the often mutual brutalities of killers and killed in this pervasive reign of terror. Though film may try taking on a collective nightmare, and taking up an oppositional stance toward it, there is still only so much we can bear having the camera take in for us.

1. These compounded and even self-embedded layers of mediation are carefully charted in a recent essay in this journal, where part of the effect suggested is that we never know what perspective the film's own "narration" is *coming from*. See Ken Provencher, "*Redacted*'s Double Vision," *Film Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (fall 2008), 32–38. More obviously than ever in a film like this, hypermediation runs the risk, in thus fracturing perspective, of hobbling critique. Hence, no doubt, the perceived need for the slow montage of impersonal photographs at the end, its terrible dossier of the Iraqi dead: an unflinching archive of incrimination rather than a shunt of subjective or editorialized POVs (and lending in retrospect a further weight to the film's last line, discussed below, about traumatic "snapshots").

2. A further historical irony comes into view. In his forthcoming *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), Anton Kaes notes the vocabulary of cinema among Weimar psychologists, where film screening was an explicit metaphor for the replay of war trauma under hypnosis. In the aftermath of Iraq War combat, however, including films about it, the metaphor would offer no potential therapeutic distance. War trauma can now be optically recorded on the spot, at point of origin, returning later in the psychic form of "recovered" video footage quite apart from any psychoanalytic, let alone mesmeric, interventions.

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ABSTRACT The new wired combat in Iraq, alternating in American films between aerial surveillance and camcorder logs or cell-phone video, tends to displace the failed resolutions of plot onto an electronic mediation that not only turns virtual on the spot, but anticipates the post-traumatic flashback as digital playback.

KEYWORDS Iraq war, war films, digital mediation, surveillance paranoia, trauma cinema

"UN FILM VAMPIRISÉ": DREYER'S *VAMPYR*

PETER SWAAB REVIEWS TWO DVD EDITIONS OF THE LONG-AWAITED GERMAN RESTORATION OF A MYSTERIOUS 1932 MASTERPIECE

In David Rudkin's fine book on *Vampyr* (BFI Film Classics, 2005), he had to concede that "the truth is, the film as we currently have it is in a wretched state" (27). That's happily no longer the case. The production history of *Vampyr* is so complicated that it's not possible to postulate a single "original" version of the film, but we now have something much closer to Dreyer's intentions. So the main thing is to welcome these DVD editions: a two-disc set in the Criterion Collection and a single-disc one from Masters of Cinema. Both present the German-language version of the film in Martin Koerber's splendid 1998 restoration, until now seen only on the big screen.

When *Vampyr* was filmed in 1930, the scenes with dialogue were shot three times, with the actors mouthing their rather minimal lines in English, French, and German in turn. The soundtracks in the three languages were added in Berlin in 1932, producing three different versions, mainly because Dreyer was opposed to the use of subtitles. German censorship records show that the full-length German version was originally 2271 meters, but the censors demanded cuts from the scenes showing the deaths of the vampire and her accomplice. These cuts total only fifty-four meters, but the longest extant version of the film is 2004 meters, which leaves 213 meters unaccounted for. Martin Koerber speculates that "Dreyer reworked the film entirely after he had to go back to it to fulfil the censor's requirements" (Criterion booklet 1, 27). When it was first screened in Berlin in 1932, the film was poorly received, and this too may have prompted Dreyer to rework its narrative. At any rate, the French version differs from the censored German one in many scenes and not just in the dialogue. The English version seems to be lost, which simplifies matters a little, but to re-complicate them a Danish one was prepared in 1933. Understandably, most prints of the film have conflated material from different versions. I remember seeing a German-language version with an almost inaudible soundtrack and—as if to compensate—gigantic subtitles in Gothic script filling half the screen. The dialogue was in German but the parcel containing the book of vampirology was labeled "to be opened after my death" in Danish.

Because of the dubious state of the film's text, we haven't been able to know which of its puzzles were intended and which were accidental. Like the surrealist painters by whom he was captivated at the time of filming, Dreyer was aiming in *Vampyr* for an art which would connect its audience to a sense of mystery. We frequently can't tell, for instance, whether its hero is clairvoyant or dreaming. Some of its mysteries are eventually cleared up, but others remain loose ends or riddles, such as the identity of the disfigured blind man in the inn, the nature of the shadows that seem able to kill, and the turning from outside a locked room of the key in the door inside. Enigma, then, is built into the conception of the film. But until now the very problematic nature of prints of *Vampyr* has made it impossible to distinguish between its crafted mysteries and those resulting from damage or distortion. *Vampyr* remains a great and mysterious film, and now the mystery can be clearly seen as part of the film and not a question about the status of the print.

"A MULTITUDE OF SPIDERS"

Both editions include valuable and scholarly extras, and Dreyer devotees may want to own both. They each feature a fascinating "visual essay" by Casper Tybjerg (who is currently working on a new biography of the director), an audio commentary from Tony Rayns, and an essay by Koerber on the restoration. Both represent Jurgen Roos's 1966 documentary on Dreyer, Criterion in its entirety, Masters of Cinema in a thirty-minute excerpt. Criterion also includes a 1958 radio broadcast by Dreyer and two booklets. The first (cited here as "Criterion 1") includes a fine critical assessment of the film by Mark Le Fanu, an essay by Kim Newman on vampires in cinema, and a 1964 interview with the producer of the film, Baron Nicolas de Gunzburg, who was also its financier and

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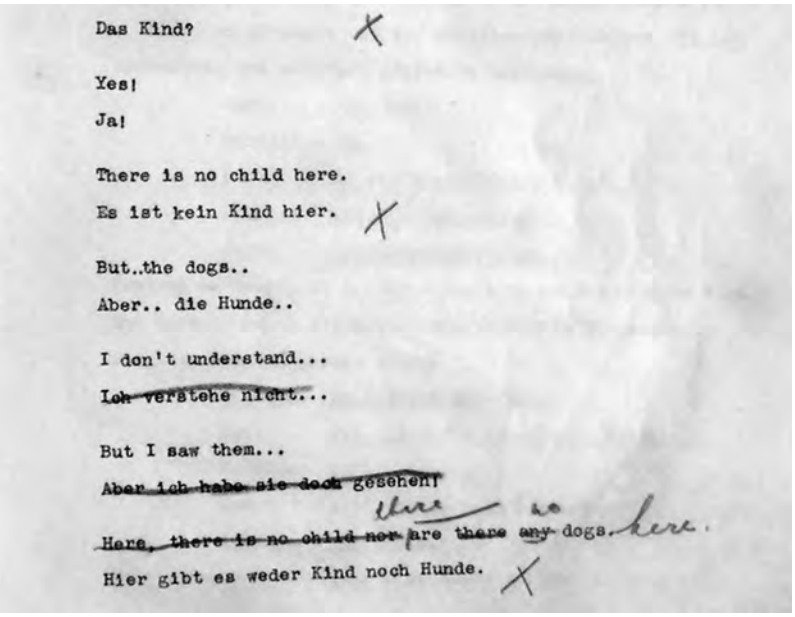

Das Kind?

Yes!

Ja!

There is no child here.

Es ist kein Kind hier.

But..the dogs..

Aber.. die Hunde..

I don't understand...

~~Ich verstehe nicht...~~

But I saw them...

~~Aber ich habe sie doch~~ gesehen!

~~Here, there is no child nor~~ are there ~~any~~ dogs.

Hier gibt es weder Kind noch Hunde.

The original devil dogs

Vampyr. © 1932 Danish Film Institute. DVD: Criterion Collection.

lead actor. The second booklet ("Criterion 2") comprises a reprint of Sheridan Le Fanu's story "Carmilla" (1872), a source for *Vampyr*, and an extremely interesting English-language translation of the French screenplay written by Dreyer and Christen Jul. English-speaking readers have until now relied on the version published in *Four Screenplays* (Indiana University Press, 1970), translated from the French by Oliver Stallybrass, but this followed a text cut and modified by Dreyer to reflect the finished film. The Criterion booklet supplements the Stallybrass text by including also (in italics) the cut and modified passages from the final draft of the original French screenplay, frequently of great importance to our understanding of the evolution of the film. These were first published by Maurice Drouzy and Charles Tesson in *Carl Th. Dreyer: Oeuvres cinématographiques* (Cinémathèque française, 1983), but the Criterion booklet makes them available for the first time in English.

The Masters of Cinema booklet has extracts from commentaries on the film by Tom Milne and by Jean and Dale Drum, an early program (1933) translated from the Danish, and some fascinating production stills. The DVD itself features a second audio commentary by Guillermo del Toro and a touching short documentary about de Gunzburg, who went on to live in New York, an ultra-stylish authority on fashion for *Harper's Magazine* and *Vogue*. But the most telling inclusions from Masters of Cinema are the uncut (though silent) versions of the two scenes shortened for censored German release, taken from the French version of the film. Although only fifty-four meters were lost, they make a great deal of difference. They show that the deaths of the vampire and the doctor who abets her were filmed in gruellingly retributive detail. The killing of the undead vampire, for instance, is much more prolonged. In the censored version, as the stake is driven we hear eight mallet blows; but we don't see them, as instead we have a cut-away to sun and clouds. But in the deleted scene we see no fewer than twenty-two blows, with the stake being banged in a little lower with each one, graphically suggesting the torn flesh below. In a version with sound we would surely hear even more than these twenty-two blows, as the scene also includes cut-aways.

The original screenplay insisted even further on violence and agony: "the blind woman writhes in her coffin and lets out a terrible cry," and eventually, after "blow after blow," "the cries become weaker and eventually stop entirely" (Criterion 2, 80–81). The scene prior to its censorship emphasizes the origin of this violence: it has a close-up shot of the wandering hero, Allan Gray, grimacing with effort or anger as he wields the mallet. The old servant Joseph is the one who aims the stake and plunges it in, but he looks away in horror as it is hammered home by Gray. It is a moment of considerable importance in the story, as Gray has throughout the film been a blankly passive figure. No doubt this came about mainly because Dreyer was making a virtue out of the limitations of his lead actor (de Gunzburg financed the film on condition he starred in it), but it seems important that the hero first expresses the intensity of his emotions as he is killing the wicked old woman. Visually speaking, he comes into the force of his own feelings and into his romantic own with Gisèle, the beautiful intended victim of the vampire, in the context of righteous revenge.

The original screenplay asked that "Blood spurts around the point of the iron stake," and at the grisly end of the scene "the blind woman's body has disappeared, and in her place the coffin is now swarming with a multitude of spiders" (Criterion 2, 81). Perhaps the spiders were hard to come by, or too reminiscent of the rats in Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922). The effect which the film settled on, of the human face dissolving into a skeleton, has become the usual iconography of these scenes—a departure from Sheridan Le Fanu's no less cinematic imagining of the climax, in which the vampire in her grave is found lying in a pool of blood and emitting a torrent of it when staked.

The other cuts demanded by the German censors come in the famous scene where the doctor is suffocated by flour. Dreyer stipulated that "the white walls [in the mill] look as if they have been seared by a white-hot fire," a climax to the hellishness conveyed in the film by its various shades of white and grey. The doctor's torment, like the vampire's, is more commensurate here with the extent of his wickedness. The wheels grind slower in the uncensored scene. We see him crying out for help, sinking down, pulling himself up, calling out again and again, with his exhausted fingers against the wire cage, and spectacles glinting to his last moment. In a film full both of uncanniness and naturalistic detail, both these death scenes stress materiality—especially of the metallic (the stake, the flour cage, the cogs and workings of the mill). Dreyer made the film in real locations partly because this was cheaper, but partly, he said, because audiences were so accustomed to studio sets that "when they see something real, it seems unusual and strange—and that is precisely the effect I wanted to achieve" (quoted by Casper Tybjerg, *Sight and Sound*, September 2008, 35). If *Vampyr* with its animated shadows, deanimated humans, and famously pallid half-light is, as Maurice Drouzy calls it in *Carl Th. Dreyer, né Nilsson* (Editions du Cerf, 1982), "un film vampirisé" (254) as well as a film about a vampire, then its all too material ending marks a liberation from its own unusual and strange territory, an exorcism or emergence from its waking dream. The extra footage in the flour mill would more decisively dramatize the contrast between the condemned world the hero is leaving behind and the new one on the far side of the river. It would mean that the doctor's death throes could be more pointedly intercut with the shots of Gray and Gisèle crossing the river. The white mists rising from the river visually resemble the flour falling on the doctor from above, but the lovers (as they now seem to be) are rowing back across their misty Acheron, while for the doctor his floury cage is his destiny and not a threshold.

AN ABSENCE OF DOGS

The supplementary screenplay passages in the Criterion booklet are important in determining which of *Vampyr*'s mysteries were part of its design. For instance, consider this passage of dialogue between Gray (called "Nikolas" in the screenplay) and the doctor (given the name "Marc"):

> MARC: Did you hear? . . .
> NIKOLAS: Yes, the child . . .
> MARC (sharply): The child?
> NIKOLAS: Yes.
> MARC: There's no child here.
> NIKOLAS: But . . . the dogs . . .
> MARC: There's no child here, and no dogs either.
> [Criterion 2, 21–22]

In *The Cinema of Carl Dreyer* (A. S. Barnes/A. Zwemmer, 1971), Tom Milne (who encountered this exchange in the film and the English screenplay) vividly described it as "a strange, sibylline conversation, almost poetic in its confusion of cross-purposes" (112). And so it is, but much less so in the uncut screenplay, for there it is preceded by a passage in which a pack of wild dogs under the control of the vampire has chased a young shepherd boy to the vampire's house. Allan Gray has come to the house to try to rescue him. The conception is powerful and unsparing. We were to hear "the dogs barking and the child's piercing cries," the "terror-stricken" boy was to arrive at the house, and shortly after this the sound of "a child weeping. Then a scream, a half-suppressed child's scream, as if a hand had closed over the mouth of the screamer" (Criterion 2, 16, 20). Would this be shown in today's cinema? The spectacle of a child being pursued in terror to his death (such is surely the implication) might be a taboo too far even now. It would have made for a manifest and horrifying instance of evil at the start of the film, with the doctor clearly implicated from the first in its cover-up. A production still shows the vampire herself marshalling the caged dogs, so some of the scene at least was shot before for whatever reasons (economy, difficulties with dogs, evolving narrative intentions?) Dreyer cut out the entire incident. Instead of a situation of melodramatic clarity, with Gray vainly attempting the rescue of an innocent, we have instead his happening on an atmosphere of uncertainty and threat.

Dreyer evidently first conceived the evil of the vampire in graphic and violent terms, but in the finished film, where we see vampirism more as a blight of the soul than a murderous assault, it has become more phantasmagoric. The cancelled scene explains the background of the dialogue, and the clarification is useful; however, it's no less important that Dreyer decided to preserve the exchange even without its

Horror, collusion, something worse than lust

Vampyr. © 1932 Danish Film Institute. DVD: Criterion Collection.

grounding, in all its estranging and cryptic abruptness (or at the very least he consented to do so under pressure of filmmaking circumstance). Not only here but more generally the dialogue in this very early talkie is far from naturalistic. Like the camerawork and editing, it avoids binding together the social space into a recognizable and familiar domestic setting. Fragmentary and minimal, omitting most of what we'd expect by way of explanation and introduction, it seems at times not social but mythic. Whereas many of the sound effects are expressionistically heightened—the parrot's cries, the *danse macabre* music, the "cutting and screeching noises of the screws" sealing Gray's coffin (Criterion 2, 76)—the spoken word is hushed and unemphatic. Martin Koerber refers to "the *con sordino* sounds captured on the variable-density track" (Criterion 1, 24): the mutedness of speech communicates human feebleness in the face of calamity.

FANTASY AND PARANOIA

In its several incarnations *Vampyr* was given various subtitles, including *Der Traum des Allan Gray* (*The Dream of Allan Gray*) and *The Strange Adventure of Allan Gray*. Which is it, a dream or an adventure? Are we to think that Gray, like the protagonist at the end of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), has been dreaming all along? Against this possibility, Dreyer in 1967 told Jean and Dale Drum that "a director must believe in the truth of his subject. He must believe in vampires and miracles" (Masters of Cinema booklet, 17). But perhaps "believe in" has a special sense here, entailing no more than a commitment to the premises of the story and the mental world of its figures. One of Dreyer's most compelling statements about the film, quoted by Ebbe Neergaard in *Carl Dreyer: A Film Director's Work* (BFI, 1950, first published in Danish in 1940), did something to bridge this gap between the real and the illusory: "Imagine that we are sitting in an ordinary room. Suddenly we are told that there is a corpse behind the door. In an instant the room we are sitting in is completely altered; everything in it has taken on another look; the light, the atmosphere have changed, though they are physically the same. This is because *we* have changed, and the objects *are* as we conceive them. That is the effect I want to get in my film" (27). This account emphasizes that there are material realities beyond the perceptions of our five senses, though it stops short of asserting the truth of the supernatural. It also makes our conceptions the determinants of our reality—an idea with its own fearsome possibilities, as Dreyer made plain in a 1939 comment, recorded in *Carl Th. Dreyer, né Nilsson*: "With *Vampyr* I wanted to create a waking dream on the screen and show that the terrifying is not found in things around us but in our own subconscious. If some event provokes in us a state of overexcitement there is no limit to the inventions of our imagination nor to the unprompted interpretations which we can give to the real things that surround us" (257, my translation).

"Not found in things around us": this diagnosis of psychological delusion is more confident than *Vampyr* itself, which evolves a style in which we are unable securely to interpret what we see either as material or as illusory. And whose is the waking dream? The film makes us uncertain about the reliability of Gray's perceptions but also about our own, and uncertain moreover about the boundaries between these two. The waking dream is not simply Allan Gray's, since the book he is given proves a wholly accurate guide to the vampiric story: moreover, it is read and followed not just by him but also by the old servant, so it cannot be Gray's imaginary book. But if the film itself creates the waking dream in which "our own subconscious" engenders terror, it becomes a document of paranoia. It is tempting in this regard to connect *Vampyr* with the director's own troubles. Dreyer himself had a major breakdown in 1933, and spent several months in a mental hospital. His use of the language of psychology ("in our own subconscious") may suggest that he had found clinical treatment helpful. But this is a period of his life we still know very little about, and Tybjerg's biography will surely tell us more about the first of the decade-long gaps between Dreyer's feature films.

CHILDREN, ELDERS, LOVERS

Compared to other stories in the vampire genre, *Vampyr* gives unusual emphasis to relations between the old and the young. The original screenplay makes this point particularly clear. Gray is met at the inn by "a little girl of thirteen" (Criterion 2, 4), who seems to have been crying and has spectacles and a timid child's voice. Is she in charge? In her parentless vulnerability she seems a sibling to the "twelve- or fourteen-year-old shepherd" (16) driven by dogs to the vampire, who is said to be "avid for the blood of young beings" (37). The array of sinister objects in the doctor's room includes the skeleton of a child (18) and "a collection of children's clogs standing neatly in rows," which don't make it into the film although in the screenplay they are what "astonishes Nikolas most" (19). The screenplay twice compares the young vampire Léone to a child, and Gisèle to "a trusting child" (40). At the end Gray and Gisèle, lost in the fog, are guided across the river by the sound of a hymn being sung to them by the ferryman and "a number of small boys" (91) on the other side ("quelques petits garçons" in Dreyer and Jul's less gender-specific French, and in a production still not used in the film they seem to be two boys and a slightly older girl). The conclusion of the screenplay, like the ending of Dreyer's *Day of Wrath* (1943), has children's voices singing as the act of retribution takes place.

Resistance and retribution

Vampyr. © 1932 Danish Film Institute. DVD: Criterion Collection.

Although not all of these elements survive into the film, there are enough to underline how far it is a story about an older generation cruelly prolonging itself by preying on the young. The vampire and doctor are like an old married couple in which the tyrannical wife dominates. The servant Joseph and his wife are benign elders to counter these nightmare parents. Joseph, indeed, has a remarkably important role in the story, even usurping the narrative functions you might expect from the younger man. He carries on reading the father's book where Gray left off, and he is the one who decides what must be done, instigating the trip to the vampire's grave where he is joined by Gray. In his own adult life Dreyer came to demonize his foster parents and especially his foster mother, while creating a saintly ideal around the mother who gave him up to adoption and died by poisoning in trying to abort another unwanted pregnancy. It would certainly be possible to give biographical attention to his concentration on cruel and abusive elders. Enough here to note that parental abuse is a theme running through Dreyer's work, from his first feature *The President* (1919), in which the title figure, who presides over a trial where his illegitimate daughter is condemned to death for killing her own bastard child, then reprieves her by arranging her escape from jail, to his screenplay of *Medea*, eventually realized by Lars von Trier, in which as Rudkin notes, most "truly Dreyeresque is the quiet deep cruelty of the scene where Medea hangs her two little children" (*Vampyr*, 17). Two of Dreyer's 1920s masterpieces, *The Parson's Widow* (1920) and *Master of the House* (1925), feature old women whose witchlike opposition to the course of young love is eventually refigured as benign spiritual authority. *Vampyr*'s Marguerite Chopin is their unredeemed nightmarish counterpart.

Maurice Drouzy's biography tells us that: "During the filming of *Joan of Arc* it was not, as one might imagine, the actress Falconetti who interested and attracted him emotionally, but Rudolf Maté, the photographer of the film, and then in his turn a young electrician, Louis Née. Two years later, while *Vampyr* was being made, it wasn't a secret for anybody working on the film that Dreyer had a pronounced weakness for this young technician" (*Carl Th. Dreyer, né Nilsson*, 269). This side of Dreyer is still not widely known. That his feelings for men were common knowledge on set is interesting. De Gunzburg was gay, and the atmosphere must have been fairly Bohemian, to judge from his wistfully camp recollection that "I was very grand in those days. I had a Rolls-Royce and a little white dog and a Russian ex-colonel as my chauffeur" (Criterion 1, 33). Drouzy's account of Dreyer's "penchant a l'homosexualité" as a "nouvelle facette de son psychisme" attributable to his feelings for his birth mother is reductive and problematic, as is his assertion that it was only "transitoire" (269): here again is an area for further biographical discovery. At least between *Mikaël* (1924) and the short film on the sculptor *Thorvaldsen* (1949), Dreyer's work represents same-sex love with some audacity. It now seems remarkably prescient of Mark Nash in his book *Dreyer* (BFI, 1977) to have suggested that the films "raise the problem of bisexuality and its mode of representation, of inscription in discursive systems" (57). Nash saw the films as showing "the socialization of desire, its containment by and within the cultural order" and associated Dreyer's Joan of Arc with the witches in *Day of Wrath* and the vampire in *Vampyr* "who all exceed the limitations imposed on female desire by the social order."

The "discursive system" of *Vampyr* is certainly an extreme one. On one side we have a feudally patrician household, with a father and two daughters. As he dies, the father passes his daughters on to the authority of another man. The further authority of the written word underwrites his instructions. Obedience to the letter of this law wins the young man the prize of a wife, and he emerges heroically from neurotic passivity into heterosexual romance. On the other side, the vampiric world is shadowed with sexual deviance. The old woman could easily be mistaken for a man; we see her in a spectacularly transgressive image preying on the prone figure of a younger woman; and the transformed Léone, in a famous sequence, turns a predatory look on her sister Gisèle. The screenplay glosses this as "an expression of lust" (Criterion 2, 46–7, in the French text "son visage exprime de la volupté" [125]), although Sybille Schmitz's extraordinary gaze in the film seems to express an appetite which can't straightforwardly be read as lust. Here Dreyer was picking up from Le Fanu's "Carmilla," with its boldly direct association of lesbian desire and vampirism. Unregulated sexual desire in the film involves the killing of children and hints of lesbian incest: the representation entails extreme moral clarity and eventual retribution, both of which are typical of Dreyer's extraordinary film.

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ABSTRACT Two restored DVD editions of Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932), show at last how the director constructed its mysterious and menacing narrative, replete (as Swaab argues) with themes of parental violence and sexual transgression.

KEYWORDS Dreyer, vampires, homosexuality, Martin Koerber, Sheridan Le Fanu

DVD DATA *Vampyr*. Director: Carl Theodor Dreyer. © 1932 Danish Film Institute. Publisher: Criterion Collection, 2008. $39.95, 2 discs. Publisher: Masters of Cinema, 2008. £19.99, 1 disc.

FILM CULTURE IN MADRID

PAUL JULIAN SMITH REPORTS FROM THE SPANISH CAPITAL ON RECENT FILM EVENTS AND NOTABLE MOVING-IMAGE INSTITUTIONS

It's the evening of Sunday February 1 in Madrid and a freezing rain is beating down on the grandly named Palacio de Congresos del Campo Ferial Juan Carlos I, the cavernous structure where the twenty-third annual ceremony of the Goyas, the Spanish Oscars, is taking place. While the stars, including Hollywood Latin royalty Penélope Cruz and Benicio del Toro, strike an unusually glamorous figure on the signature green carpet (left-leaning film folk once made a point of attending in jeans), the talk in Madrid, as elsewhere, is of crisis.

The three most nominated features suggest three distinct futures for Spanish film. *Los girasoles ciegos* (*The Blind Sunflowers*), chosen by the Spanish Academy of Film Arts and Sciences as the nation's Oscar entry (it was not nominated), embodies the most familiar genre of what we might call "the future in the past." A Civil War movie set in provincial Galicia, in which a wife hides her Socialist husband in a cupboard only to have him betrayed by an amorous priest, *Los girasoles* boasts a quality cast (Maribel Verdú from *Y tu mamá también*, 2001, Javier Cámara from Almodóvar's *Talk to Her*, 2002), a respected director with a lengthy track record (José Luis Cuerda), and the quality look of a prestige period picture. Just months after Spain's Socialist government enacted a "Law of Historical Memory" dedicated to a renewed symbolic acknowledgment of the victims of Fascism, surely *Los girasoles*, with fifteen nominations, can do no wrong?

The second of the favored films invokes rather a rapidly changing present. *El truco del manco* (*The One-Armed Man's Trick*) is the story of a physically disabled young man in the gritty outskirts of an unspecified metropolis (the film was actually shot near Barcelona), who struggles against all the odds to realize his dream: setting up a recording studio where he can make the rap music he loves. Helmed by Santiago A. Zannou, a first-time director and the son of an African immigrant, and starring the real-life rapper known by the nickname "El Langui" (he wore a silver lamé suit to the awards), *El truco* sets youth, ethnicity, and a defiant urbanism against *Los girasoles*' focus on localist (and filmic) tradition.

The third nominee is an unclassifiable maverick. *Camino*, based loosely on a true story, focuses on a teenage cancer victim, who, in her death agony, is exploited and promoted by the conservative Catholic organization Opus Dei as a modern-day saint and martyr. Despite such grim subject matter (which would seem at first to fall well within the strong Spanish tradition of social realism), Camino boasts candy-colored fantasy sequences and even fetching song-and-dance numbers, as if Alejandro Amenábar's *The Sea Inside* (2004) had been mashed up with *High School Musical* (2006). Director Javier Fesser, whose minute and eccentric visual style is often compared to Jean-Pierre Jeunet, here brings to bear the gaudy mise-en-scène of his previous children's films to a very adult subject, with exciting and discomfiting results.

So how did the three features (traditional, contemporary, and idiosyncratic) fare? *Los girasoles* was snubbed, suggesting that the academy, like the Spanish audience (but unlike its Socialist government), is now bored with so much replaying of the war. In a bid perhaps for the youth vote, *El truco* was acknowledged, with Zannou and El Langui taking the prizes for new director and actor, respectively. But it was *Camino* that swept the boards with six Goyas, including best feature and director, a risky and unexpected canonization for a polemical project. With the lifetime achievement award also going to the aged Jesús (or Jess) Franco, the unrepentant auteur of some 350 exploitation pictures, it might appear that the normally fusty Madrid-based academy thinks that it is time for a change.

In the same novel vein, most commentators celebrated what they saw as a new internationalization of Spanish cinema. Now more broadly defined, this new understanding of national film permitted crowd-pleasing acting awards to go to Cruz and del Toro for the U.S.-directed *Vicky Cristina*

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2009 Goya winners

Photo: image.net.

Barcelona and *Che*, respectively; and allowed nominations to go to films by Spanish national directors that were shot in Mexico—Agustín Díaz Yanes's *Solo quiero caminar* (*I Just Want to Walk*)—or in English in the U.K. (Alex de la Iglesia's *The Oxford Murders*).

Yet a downbeat speech by the academy's president, young female writer–director Ángeles González Sinde, harped on the perpetual crisis of the Spanish film industry and its bitter struggle against piracy (Madrid police are currently staging a high-profile campaign against the ubiquitous street sellers of pirate DVDs). And if the credit crunch has already hit Spain worse than any other western European country, with unemployment heading rapidly towards three million, it would seem that Madrid, where the property bubble has been biggest, has more than most cities to lose. Humiliatingly, the splendid new terminal at Barajas airport was paralyzed by snowfall just days before the ceremony; and the capital's conservative mayor gave his apologies for the interminable round of construction works that makes life hell for many madrileños. Moreover none of the three films mentioned above has any connection to the capital. And while only Barcelona, with its "Catalan cluster" of producers, is a plausible rival to Madrid's film infrastructure (which itself lacks a major studio or festival), the well-established decentralization of the Spanish state coupled with this new internationalization of Spanish film might well prove a mixed blessing for the city.

The forecast for cinema certainly seems as gloomy as the weather. One high-profile feature funded by the local government of Madrid has proved a spectacular flop, taking only €700,000 at the box office after an investment of €16 million. José Luis Garcí's *Sangre de mayo* (*Blood in May*) is based on the capital's most heroic historic moment: the resistance to French invaders that is also famously commemorated by Goya's *Dos de mayo* in the Prado. Lavish spending even stretched to plans (finally unrealized) to lay a red carpet along the full length of the 350 meters from the Town Hall in the Puerta del Sol to the Callao cinema in the Gran Vía in order fittingly to celebrate the film's premiere in its home town. Unimpressed by such extravagance at a time of austerity, citizens stayed at home; and just a month after its release with over two hundred prints, the film was showing on only

seven screens. A cartoon in a local free sheet I picked up on the metro illustrates the attitude of many madrileños to their homegrown cinema. A policeman asks a doctor as they stand over a murder victim's body: "What is the cause of death?" The doctor replies: "He was forced to watch Spanish movies." Certainly the domestic market can no longer absorb the hundred-plus features made each year in Spain, however high (or low) their quality.

It has not helped the local industry that 2008 was a year without a new film from Almodóvar, whose production company El Deseo has its studiously anonymous headquarters in a side street near Madrid's main bull ring. In spite of some very public disputes with the academy, who took many years to pay tribute to their greatest native talent, Almodóvar remains the prototype of the Spanish provincial who made his fortune in the capital. He is famous for working a day job at the phone company (the Telefónica tower is one of the city's best-known buildings) even as he dreamed of becoming an auteur. Almodóvar is still known, then, at home (as abroad) as the semi-official artist-in-residence of Madrid, celebrating as he does both the grand historical sights of the city (the Plaza Mayor in *The Flower of My Secret*, 1995) and its more everyday delights (the longstanding Zahara cafe which gave Gael García's character his/her name in *Bad Education*, 2004; the Circular bus line ridden by the restless protagonist in *Live Flesh*, 1997).

If local production has hit problems, then exhibition is not what it was. With Spaniards still among the most assiduous visitors to cinemas in Europe (averaging over three times a year), Madrid had supported until recently lavish, if faded, picture palaces on the glamorous Gran Vía, the city's Broadway or Shaftsbury Avenue. Now the largest, El Palacio de la Música, is sadly shuttered. And surprising rivals to cinema going have surfaced. With Gran Vía theaters now full of spectacular musicals, both transnational and homegrown, theater, previously unsung, has a larger audience than football in the capital, let alone film. Official statistics showed that madrileños are also the keenest readers in a country not generally known for its love of books.

Meanwhile television series, made at dedicated studios in Madrid like private channel Tele5's appropriately named Fiction Factory, stake a better claim than feature film to be the all-engrossing vehicle of a national narrative. On the Tuesday following the Goyas the last episode of *Herederos* (*Inheritors*), a glossy primetime soap, reached a record audience of 3.5 million. Starring much-loved film veteran Concha Velasco as a murderous matriarch who finally stages her own death, *Herederos*, with its excellent production values and polished performances, confirms the recent reemergence of state-run (and Madrid-based) network Televisión Española as a plausible leader in screen fiction. Certainly local feature films rarely match the narrative drive of booming Spanish TV drama.

And yet film retains much of its traditional prominence and prestige. The "Law of Cinema" enacted by the central Socialist government in 2007 has required flush TV companies to continue their subsidies to loss-making film producers. And few pedestrians coming down the calle Alcalá (close to where it merges with the Gran Vía to form Madrid's most monumental intersection) can miss the huge hoardings on the grand new headquarters of the Instituto Cervantes, the champion of Spanish language and culture abroad. These advertise the high-profile "Visual Chronicle of Spanish Film" hosted there, an exhibition boasting 120 stills, fifty posters, and lengthy clip tapes for ten decades of Spanish production. It is inconceivable that the institute would mount a similar exhibition to celebrate the much-despised (but arguably more successful) Spanish television sector.

However threatened, then, the capital still boasts a distinctive film culture both publicly and privately funded: the many and various universities and film schools; the rich archive and specialist screenings of the Filmoteca Española, the national film institute; a still large and diverse sector of commercial screens; a new association of women in film; and a specialist bookshop which is, as we shall see, much more than it seems.

To begin with the academics: Madrid's largest and best-known university, the Complutense, hosts not one but two Departments of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising, with both practical and theoretical tracks. Ubaldo Cuesta, the head of the second department, tells me that there are no fewer than two thousand students specializing in media studies in his department alone. The concrete, bunker-like Complutense faculty was used as a memorably creepy location by the university's most famous current alumnus: Alejandro Amenábar, whose first feature *Tesis* (1996) boasted a media studies professor who shot snuff movies in the shadowy corridors of his school's basement. It is perhaps appropriate that the wooded campus of the Complutense was also the scene of some of the bloodiest fighting in the Civil War.

Among other public universities the Carlos III in the southern suburb of Getafe stands out. (Full disclosure: your correspondent is teaching a course there in the spring 2009 semester.) With its handsome new buildings and excellent facilities, this new institution (named for a rare enlightened Spanish monarch) has fewer students than its rivals, being more selective on entry, but maintains a high reputation. Head of department Manuel Palacio is also one of the few Spanish academics to take TV fiction as seriously as feature film.

The Telefónica tower

Photo: Paul Julian Smith.

Beyond these public institutions, there are at least six private universities in the Madrid area with media studies departments (which in Spain generally go by the name of "Audiovisual Communication and Advertising/Journalism"). Of the many private film schools, focusing on practical work, the best known is perhaps the ECAM (Escuela de Cinematografía y del Audiovisual de Madrid), part funded by the government of the local region, and headed by respected film and TV director Fernando Méndez Leite. You can view some intriguing shorts by current students at http://www.ecam.es/.

The national film archive is lodged at the Filmoteca Española (founded in 1953), where the library is headed by noted Buñuel scholar Javier Herrera. It remained open in early 2009 even as its technical facilities are being upgraded. When the workmen aren't in attendance, the Filmoteca hosts eclectic exhibitions in its basement. Once sited in a distant forest disturbingly close to a nuclear power institute, the Filmoteca is now housed in a handsome period building in the bustling street of la Magdalena. Scholars come here to view rare films, to consult press files, original scripts, and publicity materials, and for access to special collections such as the invaluable Buñuel archive.

The Filmoteca also runs the charming two-screen Ciné Doré, just around the corner in the calle Santa Isabel. This historic theater's picturesque facade was shown in *Talk to Her*: it was where male nurse Javier Cámara claimed to have seen *The Shrinking Lover*, an unlikely silent classic recreated within Almodóvar's film. In February 2009 this cinema, which boasts an attractive café and small bookshop, was showing a wide selection of vintage film, including a retrospective of works by the recently deceased and highly respected screenwriter Rafael Azcona (the uncharacteristically bland *Los girasoles ciegos* had been his last project). Other rare treats included seasons of Sidney Pollack and Alain Robbe-Grillet.

As for the commercial cinemas, the Palacio de la Música may be closed for renovation into (what else?) a music venue, but the equally grand Palacio de la Prensa just across the Gran Vía remains open. All the same, central picture palaces have, as elsewhere, been overtaken by suburban multiplexes. Kinépolis in distant Pozuelo lays claim to being Spain's most profitable single site. At the time of writing it has twenty-eight features playing, overwhelmingly U.S. imports. More congenial to *Film Quarterly* readers would be the excellent Renoir arthouse chain (founded in 1986), which boasts seven cinemas in the capital, two of them yards from the very central location of the Plaza de España (the equivalent of Times or Trafalgar Square). Uniquely showing features only in the original version (the dubbing habit has been engrained in Spain since dictator Francisco Franco imposed it as part of his censorship regime), the Renoirs have a scholarly bent, giving out excellent screening notes on each film for free, a potent inducement to cinephilia. They also publish a monthly free sheet baptized, in honor of Renoir, *La gran ilusión*, and offer a loyalty card giving access to cheaper tickets, special events, and private screenings.

More eccentric is the Acteón cinema, based in the calle Montera, the most notorious street for prostitution in the whole of Madrid. While its selection of films is conventional, the rationale for its name, prominently posted inside, is strikingly bizarre: just as the hunter Actaeon was devoured by his own hounds after witnessing the goddess Diana as she bathed, so cinema permits mere mortals to come close to the heavenly bodies we also desire.

Like the sex workers shivering in the street outside, women filmmakers in Spain have some reason to be skeptical of such misogynist myths. While there are a small number of prominent female directors from around the country (most

Shop windows for film culture

Photos: Paul Julian Smith.

successfully, Icíar Bollaín and Gracia Querejeta), the founding in 2007 of a women's film and media society (Asociación de Mujeres Cineastas y de los Medios Audiovisuales) marks a much-needed step forward. This is especially the case as the proportion of new directors who are women actually fell to ten percent in the 2000s, from seventeen percent in the previous decade. The new organization, whose Spanish acronym CIMA handily means "summit," sponsors discussions

and book launches, open (like its membership) to both men and women.

Equally welcoming is Madrid's most pleasurable resource for film culture, the bookshop Ocho y Medio ("Eight and a Half"—named, of course, for Fellini), which opened in 1995. Situated just off the Plaza de España in a movie ghetto or microneighborhood that also boasts two of the Renoir theaters and the newly renamed Golem arthouse, Ocho y Medio has windows that are always worth watching. In February they featured a cardboard cutout of Penélope Cruz dressed in the original wardrobe the star wore in *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, when she played the undemanding, but prizewinning, role of a Latin spitfire. (Inside you can also see the actual blackboard on which she chalked up the menu when her character in Almodóvar's *Volver*, 2006, briefly opened a restaurant.) For Spanish-speakers, the shop publishes under its own imprint an impressive range of scripts and scholarly studies, also available through a website (www.ochoymedio.com).

Testimony to its influence in the capital and beyond, handwritten tributes from film luminaries, both local and global, grace the bookshop's walls: Almodóvar writes soberly "Cinema educated me," while Natalie Portman pens, in perfect but enigmatic Spanish, "I eat neither fish nor meat." Alongside the memorabilia are a wide selection of film and media books in both Spanish and English (some 15,000 according to the owners), including unexpected trouvailles such as copies of legendary 1970s film-theory periodical *Contracampo* (*Reverse Shot*). In spite of the gathering economic storms, which are surely unfavorable to specialist bookshops everywhere, Ocho y Medio has also recently expanded to embrace the locale next door. Baptized El gatopardo (for Visconti), this sister shop has a more exquisite atmosphere than the original, boasting rare books in fine bindings, overstuffed armchairs, and even a comfortable toilet (a great luxury in a city deprived of such facilities). There could be no better place to start to explore Madrid's film culture, and to forget both the crisis and the climate, than in the comfort of this invaluable store.

Thanks to Francisco A. Zurián.

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ABSTRACT With talk of a crisis of Spanish cinema, Paul Julian Smith reports from Madrid, spring 2009, and discusses: the Goya awards (best film won by Javier Fesser's *Camino*), the struggling but lively theatrical exhibition, burgeoning TV production, education facilities, the eminent presence of Almodóvar, and the Ocho y Medio bookshop.

KEYWORDS Spanish cinema, Spanish television, Madrid on film, Almodóvar, Goyas 2009

KANSAS
HALF PAGE

NEW PATHS FOR GERMAN CINEMA

If one remembers the Berlin International Film Festival's origins in 1950s Cold War propaganda (as an attraction of West Berlin), it is not surprising that this market of cinematic wares now showcases the achievements of the unified Germany. In 2000, the festival's headquarters and principal venues relocated to Potsdamer Platz. Just a few blocks south of the Brandenburg Gate, the Holocaust Memorial, and Germany's new government district, the Platz lies along the border of the formerly divided city. The flashy, corporate complex celebrates German film culture: from the Marlene-Dietrich-Platz and the bar Billy Wilder's, to the German Cinemathèque and the Film and Television Academy.

From February 5–15, the Platz's pedestrian traffic surged as four thousand journalists made their way through throngs of starstruck Berliners—and past a billboard welcoming Jury President Tilda Swinton, Germany's most successful global filmmaker Tom Tykwer, and the festival director Dieter Kosslick to the "Platz to be"—to the morning press screenings. In a year commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, a red staircase placed in the center of the square led to a majestic view of all that had been built and changed in Germany's new-old capital since 1989. Like other festivals, the Berlinale is part promotional enterprise, part civic celebration, part melting pot.

German cinema exhibits commercial and artistic ambitions in varying proportions, disclosing tensions between a domestic popular cinema; exportable (usually historical) epics; international (often English-language) co-productions; and a critically respected yet commercially unviable art cinema. At odds with German audiences' preference for (often dubbed) Hollywood imports and international audiences' expectations (notably U.S. receptiveness to Holocaust and World War II dramas), the breadth of today's German cinema becomes most apparent during the Berlinale. And in programming choices that range from pompous publicity ploys to modest proposals, from national spectacle to embarrassed caution, this year's festival dramatized a recent shift in over six decades of German guilt and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("getting over the past").

The opening film (an American-German-British co-production) represented blockbuster aspirations. Tykwer's thriller *The International* emphasizes Berlin as a film location (its opening sequence takes place in front of the city's much touted new Central Train Station) appropriate for a global industry. Recognizable, mobile non-German characters link the German capital to other world metropolises: Clive Owen's Interpol agent and Naomi Watts's assistant district attorney chase members of an organized crime ring (including a former Stasi operative) from Berlin to Milan to New York to Istanbul. The film introduces a touch of restraint to the audiovisual pyrotechnics recognizable from *Run, Lola, Run* (1998), *The Princess and the Warrior* (2000), *Heaven* (2002), and even *Perfume* (2006). The carefully choreographed action sequences, particularly one that frames violent spectacle amid video art installations in the Guggenheim Museum, are offset by a hitherto uncharacteristic exploration of psychological depth and obsession. (Berlin locations could also be seen in Stephen Daldry's German-American *The Reader*, shown out of competition, and Theo Angelopoulos's Greek-Italian-German-French-Russian *The Dust of Time*.)

A mid-festival gala premiere of Hermine Huntgeburth's *Effi Briest*, the most recent adaptation of Theodor Fontane's 1896 adultery novel, a costume melodrama in which a young, neglected wife in the Prussian provinces (now Poland) takes up with a brash army major, demonstrated the political appeal of festival screenings of homegrown films. The film, which flaunts the glorious coastal landscapes of Germany's colonial past and features views of "old Berlin" in the monarchical splendor of Unter den Linden (the city's principal cultural thoroughfare), attracted an audience of political and artistic dignitaries to the lavish Friedrichstadtpalast. In town to screen his documentary, the aptly titled *In Berlin*, prodigal native son Michael Ballhaus (once Fassbinder's cinematographer) presented one of three Berlinale Camera awards to *Effi Briest*'s producer and German Film Academy President Günter Rohrbach, who is in turn responsible for some of (West) Germany's largest-scale productions and most successful exports, including *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980), *The Boat* (1981), *The Neverending Story* (1984), and *Stalingrad* (1993). (The other awards went to Claude Chabrol and Manoel de Oliveira.) As *Effi Briest*'s cast of internationally recognizable actors—Sebastian Koch (*The Lives of Others*, 2006, and *Black Book*, 2006), Julia Jentsch (*Sophie Scholl: The Final Days*, 2005, and *The Edukators*, 2004), and Juliane

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Everyone Else

Courtesy Berlin Film Festival.

Köhler (who also appeared in three additional festival films: *Eden Is West*, *A Woman in Berlin*, and *Adam Resurrected*) filed into a row of reserved seats, Chancellor Angela Merkel looked on from the center of the theater.

It is too bad that the festival organizers chose such a mediocre film to celebrate the recent achievements of German cinema. Trading the subtlety of one kiss, the slightest of transgressions in Fontane's novel, for a more contemporary, crowd-pleasing equivalent—sex on a Baltic beach—*Effi Briest* reflects the industry's preoccupation with box-office returns and (often elusive) international success. As the country's historical epics and period dramas continue to define the international perception of German cinema, the new energies of a younger generation of filmmakers have gone relatively unnoticed abroad. Yet this, too, is the task of the Berlinale: to place a *variety* of German films advantageously within the larger festival program. At its best, the Berlinale program featured a film from a little-known German director within the competition's lineup of big names (Bertrand Tavernier, Andrzej Wajda, Costa-Gavras, Stephen Frears, and Chen Kaige) and buzz countries (Iran, South Korea, China, and Romania). This year Maren Ade's *Everyone Else*, about a thirtysomething Berlin couple vacationing in Sardinia, held its own alongside Asghar Farhadi's *About Elly*, an exquisite Iranian ensemble piece in which a woman disappears during a visit to a beach house on the Caspian Sea.

Ade's first feature, *The Forest for the Trees* (2003), established the potential international appeal of her work (it was screened at both Sundance and Toronto). It also pigeonholed her domestically as an aesthetic adherent of the "Berlin School"—a term coined by Merten Worthmann in 2001 (in reference to Angela Schanelec)—one applauded by serious critics and cineastes, but shunned by mass audiences as well as by industry players (including, in recent years, Rohrbach) with a preference for big-budget time-travel and "Best Foreign Film" contenders. Recent global successes such as *Nowhere in Africa* (2001), *Goodbye Lenin!* (2003), *Downfall* (2004), *The Lives of Others*, and the German-Austrian *The Counterfeiters* (2007) boast star casts, high production values, and tightly woven plots. In contrast, the directors associated with the Berlin School movement (including Schanelec, Thomas Arslan, Maria Speth, Valeska Grisebach, and Henner Winckler) often work with unknowns or nonprofessionals, and favor the meditative qualities of the long take over hyperkinetic editing and sensational plot twists; ambiguous endings over narrative resolution; complex, impenetrable characters over clearly defined attributes and motivational arcs; and contemporary settings and quotidian drama over

historical backdrops and the readymade dramatic frameworks of the Nazi and communist pasts.

Everyone Else is exemplary of the more austere approach: a study of two people, a man and a woman, in and out of love, too far into life to turn back, but not quite far enough to have arrived somewhere. As Chris (Lars Eidinger), a failed architect, and Gitti (Birgit Minichmayr) lounge along the façades of a villa belonging to Chris's family or wander through the twisted rock formations of this mountainous island, the characters alternate between inertia and heightened emotional states, quick turns of humor and despair, intimacy and discord, the idealistic rejection of bourgeois values and the attraction to a settled life of strict gender roles, professional success, and economic stability. All the while Bernhard Keller's cinematography, honed on the observational virtuosity of Grisebach's *Be My Star* (2001) and *Longing* (2006), accentuates the yellows of the sun and sand, the warmth of the house's interior—in contrast to the cold and decay of the couple's deteriorating relationship. The winner of the Silver Bear for Best Director, *Everyone Else* is a German film whose accomplishment lies less in an appeal to national identity than in an exploration of human relationships, the boundaries of self and other, and the possibilities of filmic representation.

Where guilt was to be had at this year's festival, it was contemporary, global, and shared rather than specifically German and historical. Hans-Christian Schmid, whose emerging *oeuvre* lies somewhere between the industry's ambitious exports and the Berlin School's aesthetic asceticism, has, since his 2003 competition entry *Distant Lights*, addressed the geopolitics of post-communist Europe. With the multilingual German-Danish-Dutch political thriller *Storm* in competition and a documentary, *The Wondrous World of Laundry*, on German-Polish border relations in the "Forum for Young Film" strand, Schmidt seems intent on recharting the territory of the German story, on doing for Germany's role in the European Union what Fatih Akin has done, in *Head On* (2004) and *The Edge of Heaven* (2007), for the country's ties to Turkey: that is, to connect places through plotlines.

Storm is set between the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague, where the prosecutor Hannah (Kerry Fox) attempts to try a Serbian war criminal; the Republika Srpska, which is involved in a cover-up of the Yugoslavian National Army's acts of sexual violence against Bosnian Muslim women; and Berlin, where the reluctant witness and victim Mira (Anamaria Marinca) leads a quiet post-war life with her German husband and child. As the film shifts between the personal and the political, between Hannah's sense of justice and the male-dominated deal-making of international diplomacy, "Germany" is not quite the point. Rather than being a site of perpetration, Berlin becomes a space of asylum, a location haunted by other, non-German pasts, those brought into the country from without. In the figure of Hannah's assistant, a young German idealist (Alexander Fehling), Germany is for once part of the solution, a consummate team player. But throughout the film Bogumil Godfrejow's handheld camera seems to render ambiguous both individual motives and the apparent pattern of European alliances and networks.

Storm

Courtesy Berlin Film Festival.

Somewhere between the pomp of trumpeting Berlin's revival as a world-class film location for domestic and foreign productions, the young filmmakers' rejection of clichéd German material, and the trend of co-financing English-language and multilingual features, German cinema both finds and loses itself. In a last effort to command the attention of film-fatigued journalists, the festival, with less fanfare than one might expect, screened *Germany 09: 13 Short Films about the State of a Nation* at 8.30 a.m. on the final Friday. A calling card for those whose eyes were still open, *Germany 09* presented German cinema in its ideal form: as a coalition of artistic visions and a variety of voices in which Tykwer and Akin stand alongside proponents of the Berlin School.

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LA MALAVITA: *GOMORRAH* AND NAPLES

Our first night in Naples, a little past midnight, my wife and I were woken by several gunshots, followed by a woman screaming in English, "He's still alive! He's still alive!" We looked out the eighth-floor window of our hotel, as did many of the residents of the apartment high-rise opposite us, and waited for the anticipated sirens and flashing police lights. After all, we were only a block from the downtown police headquarters near the Bay of Naples—the police headquarters that, in *Midnight in Sicily* (Vintage, 1996), Australian journalist Peter Robb described as built by Mussolini "in fascist modernist monumental style, [and among] the city's only decent new buildings in the last hundred years." Yes, high praise indeed: Mussolini gave Naples some of its only decent architecture. But then architecture—or the brutal lack of decent or hospitable architecture—is what Naples, and by extension *Gomorrah*, are about.

That happened some eight years ago when my wife and I vacationed in southern Italy. At that time my main filmic reference for Naples was native Francesco Rosi's great *Hands Over the City* (1963), a frenetic nightmare about political corruption in the construction rackets that, since then, have rendered Naples the most densely populated and ugliest city in western Europe, home to 3.5 million and crammed with ramshackle high-rises, many of them built illegally, many of which look as though the slightest tremor would topple them. And if *Gomorrah* has an antecedent it would be *Hands Over the City*, which opens with a sweeping pan of some of these hideous Neapolitan high-rises. In black-and-white, the film documents the city's construction rackets, the collaboration of the gangster-controlled city council, the fraud that goes into putting up these buildings—and one of which, scheduled for demolition, was collapsed during the filming. Yet despite the unbridled corruption, the film, unlike *Gomorrah*, radiates a warmth; Rosi is still in love with his native city though he's painting a portrait of the sleaze and fraud that would result, nearly half a century later, in the disaster portrayed in *Gomorrah*.

Rosi never mentions the Camorra in his film, perhaps because the plague of heroin and cocaine had not yet arrived to make the clans so rich and powerful, but in a follow-up thirty years later, his documentary *Neapolitan Diary* (1992)—shot on the occasion of a screening of *Hands Over the City* at the University of Naples School of Architecture—he does. In fact, people in the movie—professors, students, bureaucrats, city officials—can't shut up about the Camorra and how it has destroyed Naples. Rosi himself, in a 2004 interview with *CinemaCittà*, a journal of architecture, urban studies, cinema, and communications out of the University of Reggio Calabria (included in the booklet for the Criterion DVD), said, "in the criminal underworld, the Camorra, which is different than the [Sicilian] Mafia but still criminal, exerts extraordinary power over the economy, more so than over politics. The Mafia has always had enormous power over politics, more so than over the economy."

But perhaps even more interesting in reference to *Gomorrah* are the opening shots of *Neapolitan Diary*: a gliding aerial pan from a helicopter of the awful high-rises, reminiscent of the opening pan of *Hands Over the City*, the camera then tracking in on a housing development that looks suspiciously like the setting for much of *Gomorrah*, followed by a cut to the breezeways of the development itself—yes, the resemblance is not just generic but genetic—where teenage criminals have just been rounded up in a real-life police sweep.

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The day after the shooting incident, my wife and I drove to my grandmother's ancestral village in the mountains northeast of Naples. On the way back we missed the turnoff for the autostrada and wound up on a back road running through the countryside. Then at a crossroads in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of beautiful—and, as it turns out, poisoned—farm fields, we came upon a half-dozen big-rigs parked along the shoulder, and four or five tall ebony African hookers strutting back and forth on platform heels, and in gold and silver lamé hot pants. It looked like a scene out of Fellini scripted by Pasolini, and my wife and I debated whether they were transvestites or members of the tall-statured Tutsi group. (*Gomorrah* includes a small nod to Fellini, to *La dolce vita* [1960], when the statue of a saint is lowered by rope into the courtyard of a decrepit apartment complex bustling with drug traffic—call it *La malavita*.)

We reentered Naples through the densely populated outskirts, that nightmare of dilapidated high-rise apartment buildings that ring the city center and that Rosi documented so well, and that provide the setting for much of *Gomorrah*. I

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Infernal architecture

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grew up in the Bronx and at its worst the South Bronx never looked so bad. The buildings are crammed in helter-skelter, the landscaping minimal, the streets choked with traffic. Prior to our trip I had read in a travel guide that in Naples (not Rome, not Palermo) traffic lights are a mere suggestion. I thought that an exaggeration until the first time I stopped at a red light and the six drivers behind me all sat on their horns until I drove through, whereupon they followed. Later, strolling along the via Toledo packed with its street merchants, we noticed some vendors sold white T-shirts with diagonal black bars across the fronts—so if a traffic cop glanced at you he would think you were wearing a seat belt. That's the lawlessness at its most mundane.

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Based on the best-selling journalistic exposé of the same name by Roberto Saviano, director Matteo Garrone's post-neorealist docudrama *Gomorrah* provides a searing look into the Camorra, the loose confederation of criminal gangs who more or less rule Naples and the surrounding Campanian countryside. Even though set in southern Italy, on the Mediterranean, it's shot in somber colors: washed-out grays, blues, and browns. The movie *looks* dirty and feels dirtier. Although it opens, improbably, in a tanning salon where everyone is bathed in a blue alien light. You'd think they were on a spaceship—call it neosurrealism—or at least until the film's first massacre goes down in the salon.

And so it goes. As these colorless gangsters, largely devoid of personality, deal drugs in the ugly housing developments, dole out welfare payments to families of imprisoned members, enforce discipline with murders, run whorehouses, and dump toxic wastes all over the beautiful Campanian countryside—over the lands where the buffalos, who produce the dioxin-laden milk for mozzarella, roam (I stopped buying Italian mozzarella after reading the book), a vivid if depressing portrait emerges of gangs so shortsighted they have turned their own city into the heroin capital of Europe and seem never to have learned the axiom, "You don't crap where you eat."

Garrone intercuts and dramatizes five stories from the book, one of which involves a talented but underpaid working-class dress designer who creates top gowns in a clandestine Camorra factory for celebrities like Scarlet Johansson who he sees at an awards ceremony on TV wearing his cream-colored creation (in the book, oddly, it's Angelina Jolie)—and who is blissfully unaware that her haute couture gown does not hail from a top Italian design house. Another story involves a mousy, nervewracked, middle-aged Camorra bagman (do not think *Michael Clayton*) who delivers payments to the families of imprisoned camorristi. Not a bad person, along his route he helps a woman whose apartment has been flooded by a broken pipe, a simple mess compared to the mess, the massacre, he later finds

Toxic fixers

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himself tiptoeing out of, past a half-dozen or so corpses he was just chatting with a minute earlier. And in yet another story, set in the same locale, we see a gangster cutting drugs in a blender, test-tasting it, then chasing the taste with a shot of sambuca. The narcotics get sold in the massive, blocky, decrepit Vele di Sampi housing projects of their neighborhood, setting for much of the movie, with lookouts posted all around, no different really than any drug operation from the housing projects of New York City to those of Oakland, California.

For me, though, the most powerful of the five stories—and, on the face of it, the least violent—involves waste-disposal management. In the acclaimed HBO series *The Sopranos*, about a New Jersey crime family of Neapolitan ancestry, Tony Soprano's "legitimate" business was as a waste-disposal manager. But his garbage racket was small potatoes compared to the scale and scope of what we see in *Gomorrah*. The film's only character who comes across with any cheer, any personality, is a Camorra waste manager, a middle-aged man played by Toni Servillo. Unlike the other gangsters, he's usually in good spirits as he travels the countryside with his young apprentice Roberto (played by Carmine Paternoster and modeled on the author—who incidentally plays a large role in the book but is otherwise absent from the film). They check out abandoned gas stations, abandoned quarries, and other sites, looking for places to dump the poisonous wastes hauled in from all over Italy, and Roberto visits potential sites on his computer. At one place, a drum breaks open splashing toxic waste on a truck driver, badly burning him. The other truckers quit and after learning the African workers don't even know how to drive, the waste manager, resourceful if nothing else, hires eleven- and twelve-year-old local kids, who pile the pillows beneath their behinds so they can reach the steering wheel and see out the windshield.

At one stop on his itinerary, the older man accepts a basket of peaches from an elderly woman. "What beautiful peaches! Thank you, signora," he says, and we don't realize immediately what a chilling moment it is. A little later, on the drive back to Naples, he tells Roberto, "Toss that stuff. Can't you tell how they stink?" Yes, poisonous fruit from the lost Campanian Eden. (By the time we see topless dancers we figure their balloon breasts are toxic-waste sites too.) Roberto, to his credit, makes the one moral choice in the movie: disgusted with the work, he quits. His mentor gives a little speech, almost verbatim from the book: "Does this job disgust you? Robbe', do you know that we are the ones who made it possible for this shit country to enter the European Union? . . . Do you know how many workers' asses have been saved because I fixed it so their companies didn't spend a fucking cent [on legal waste disposal]?" And the older man mutters, "Go fuck yourself. Go make pizza." Which is, in its way, ironic, since pizza, not toxic waste, is Naples' most beloved gift to the world.

The last of the five intercut stories involves two older teens, Ciro (Ciro Petrone) and Marco (Marco Macor), who so aspire to the thug life they've memorized parts of Brian De Palma's *Scarface* (1983). "I'm Tony Montana," one kid shouts, apparently forgetting how he winds up. These two teens are so puffed up with self-importance they think they're a gang onto themselves: they rip off local Colombian drug dealers, they rip off weapons from the hidden cache of the neighborhood Camorra gang and then, wading in the marshes in nothing but their underpants, have fun firing their newly acquired toys. Call them Dumb and Dumber. The local boss reads them the riot act and gives them a day to return the weapons, but they make the mistake of not taking him seriously. In his book Saviano provides his own filmic analogy, comparing their end to that of Joe Pesci's character in Martin Scorsese's *GoodFellas* (1990), where he shows up for what he believes will be his formal induction into a Mafia family but instead is executed for his unauthorized murder of a made Mafia man. To the camorristi who work out the logistics of disposing of these teenagers, the whole thing is just a distraction: "[All this] for two kids . . . what a waste of time." Then one man, wearing shorts, climbs into the cabin of a bulldozer whose blade has been loaded with their corpses and rumbles off down the beach. Just another consignment of illegal toxic waste to be dumped.

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When I first saw *GoodFellas* I complained in an *East Bay Express* review that, unlike Scorsese's earlier *Mean Streets* (1973) and *Raging Bull* (1980), it lacked heart. But for all that, *Gomorrah* makes *GoodFellas* look like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1962). It is that cold and heartless. Despite the numerous killings, the movie proceeds undramatically, replete with matter-of-fact anarchy and chaos. At least *GoodFellas*' gangsters still liked their Italian food.

Which is probably why *Gomorrah* has been hailed as shattering any romantic myths we may yet harbor about gangsters. Manohla Dargis wrote in *The New York Times* that it's "ferociously unsentimental . . . a bracing corrective to the sentimentalized Mafia thug popularized on both the big and small screens." Kenneth Turan wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* that *Gomorrah* "is a gangster film that departs from the glamorizing norm . . . a vividly panoramic film about a pitiless world of criminality." And Christy Lemire wrote for the Associated Press that *Gomorrah* "upends everything you think you know about the mob and mob movies." All of which is true enough. Yet to be sure, I no longer know what the "glamorizing norm" is, since this sort of praise is periodically bestowed on gangster films. One year after *The Godfather* (1972), Francesco Rosi's own gangster film *Lucky*

Waste management

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Luciano starring Gian Maria Volonté in the title role was released, and Giovanni Grazzini wrote in *Corriere della sera* on October 20, 1973, "What distinguishes Rosi's film from others on the Mafia is its refusal to glamorize the liturgy of violence." So then: glamorize, *deglamorize* . . . glamorize, *deglamorize* . . . That is, there's a deglamorizing norm too.

Yet when all is said and done, what for me is most shocking about *Gomorrah* is the book is still more shocking. Not that it tells you where the bodies are buried but, rather, where the toxic wastes come from and go to—the wastes which have led, as the movie's end credits tell us, to higher levels of cancer, higher levels of kidney failure, higher numbers of tumors, etc., etc., in the local populations. And the arms depots! The stash of automatic weapons that the two teenagers rip off is peanuts compared to the transactions enumerated in the book. On the heels of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, Camorra sales representatives were all over the globe, cutting deals with former Communist officials for major weapons purchases; acquiring arms and explosives for Spain's Basque separatists in exchange for cocaine they imported from South American leftist guerrilla groups; offering the Argentine military major arms for their Falkland Islands war against the British; and more. What for me the movie lacked, with the exception of the toxic-waste story, is the sheer scale of the misery visited upon Naples, Campania, and the world by the Camorra clans, and that scale includes the dehumanizing architectural nightmare that Rosi shows in long sweeping pans, and that can only be captured in long sweeping pans.

Incidentally, our first night in Naples after the gunshots, the police never came. We went back to sleep and the next morning I asked at the front desk about the shooting. Shrugs all around. No one had heard a thing.

MICHAEL COVINO, author of the novel *The Negative* (Viking Press, 1993), is a former film critic for the *East Bay Express*.

THE *GOMORRAH* DOCTRINE

Matteo Garrone's *Gomorrah* is predictably but not conventionally violent. The director knows filmgoers have a ready-made Mafia film vocabulary, a set of expectations that includes a high level of brutality and gore. There's even an odd comfort in the genre conventions: lush cinematography and special effects reassure us that the violence takes place in a world separated from our own. But in *Gomorrah*, shots cut away quickly, registering the kill without lingering. Garrone shows an escapeless reality of winners and losers, in which make-believe and mortality have become a lethal blur. The pared-down, unassuming camerawork insists on the tense tedium of a criminal life overshadowed by the constant anxiety of execution. Based on Roberto Saviano's book, the film centers on the Secondigliano housing project, just north of Naples. The characters scurry along dilapidated passageways, rusted and puddled, the incarcerating environment reminiscent of Andrei Tarkovsky's dystopian Zone (*Stalker*, 1972). The Camorra crime syndicate, a decentralized and much older version of the Sicilian Mafia, controls the area, where it has (according to an extensive interview with Saviano on the DVD) set up the "the largest open-air drug-pushing marketplace in the world." The Camorra sell any drug imaginable, but their interests extend far beyond narcotics and gambling, to stakes in toxic-waste dumps and many legitimate businesses, including (in Saviano's account) a contribution to the World Trade Center reconstruction project.

The film's opening, a tanning-salon massacre, the fall guys bathed in otherworldly electric blue, sets up a recurring sense of confused dislocation. It takes a few seconds to recognize that these are tanning booths. The cut from the gaudy blue interior to the killers' tidy exit through the pokey salon entrance is unsettling. Garrone skips the usual payoffs of exposition to suggest nothing more than business as usual: another day, another hit. The subsequent narrative, equally without explanation and nearly always without music, moves between five storylines and six characters: Toto (Salvatore Abruzzese), a tween lookout eager to be initiated; Marco (Marco Macor) and Ciro (Ciro Petrone), young men on the make, hopped-up on *Scarface* fantasies; Don Ciro (Gianfelice Imparato), the bagman who delivers cash to prisoners' relatives; entrepreneur Franco (Tony Sevillo), who makes a tidy sum in toxic-waste disposal; and Pasquale (Salvatore Canatalupo), a master tailor who moonlights teaching haute-couture secrets at a Chinese sweatshop. Cinematographer Marco Onorato's camera often snoops, peering around to find where the action is, a stand-in for Saviano's first-person narrative. The effect is oppressive, suggesting no way out from the all-enveloping Camorra.

In his interview, Saviano quotes the three principles of Carmine Alfieri, a Camorra boss: "business, business, business"—nothing is allowed to get in the way. Confronted by a work stoppage after an immigrant driver succumbs to the burns from a leaking toxic-waste barrel, Franco rounds up a dozen kids to take their place. He boosts them into the truck cabs, barking instructions. The camera pulls up and back, emphasizing the scale of the damage being done. Franco sees only stopped trucks that have to be driven, a fee to be collected. *Gomorrah* chillingly emphasizes a perverse kind of efficiency, a twisted work ethic, driven by what Saviano calls the "longing for self-promotion." But Marco and Ciro, scampering around the grasslands of a foul lagoon as if they were outside social organization altogether, want a free pass to status and power. Besotted by Tony Montana, seeing Colombians everywhere, these two prove to be expert fantasists but disastrous careerists, antagonizing everybody. They end up victims of their own incompetence. Despite their avowed objective to work for themselves, Marco and Ciro are ultimately gulled into their own destruction by agreeing to do a hit for a Camorra higher-up.

One brief scene in which Toto and a few other youngsters horse around in a rooftop wading pool offers a few moments of bright color in *Gomorrah*'s bled-dry palette. Harsh or dimly lit interiors match the blighted exteriors. Other than a few glimpses of Venice, the scenes beyond the housing project take place in further marginalized areas. There's no sense of a center. In a country where ancient history looms large, *Gomorrah* offers only ersatz versions of the past. Ciro and Marco act out a climactic scene from *Scarface* in the ruin of a former boss's mansion, itself modeled on Tony Montana's Miami villa; there is also a stall full of garden-ornament statuary where Pasquale's Chinese employers crash. These nearly parodic images visually reinforce the sense that the film takes place in a gaudily counterfeit world. There is a sense of isolation (the local dialect is so specific

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The scale of the disaster

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that the film was subtitled for Italians). Secondigliano sometimes seems like a quarantined colony. Leslie Shatz's mechanistic soundscape amplifies the ruination of the images, the faraway drone of the invisible city barely audible. The shouted lookout signals merge with mundane apartment noises and the inevitable gunfire. The pop songs with which the characters celebrate their squalid victories are like ironic audio postcards from *dolce vita* Italy. A persistent sound is the whirr of expert cash-counting, echoed by Shatz in the final sound of surf breaking as a bulldozer deposits the bodies of Marco and Ciro on the beach.

The behind-the-scenes DVD additions bear out Saviano's remark, during the interview, that the actors (many of them nonprofessional locals) were having a hard time keeping their real lives separate from the acting. Mothers rush in to embrace their movie-bloodied sons and the locals worry about playing characters that will tarnish their local image. Among the most striking behind-the-scenes views are moments when the locals watch the rushes, transfixed by their movie-selves on the monitor. Giovanni Venosa, who, as Giovanni in the film, pushes for the execution of Marco and Ciro, objects to the liberties the script takes with the actual story on which that episode is based, clearly making Garrone nervous. Saviano notes that "cinema somehow shapes the souls of these criminals," pointing out that the real Camorra even shoot like people in the movies, the wrist turned, the gun held flat. He points out that bosses often copy movie gangsters (mostly Tony Montana) in attitude and dress, using the cinema as "a shortcut to show their power."

One natural comparison to *Gomorrah* is Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Accatone* (1961), which also depicts macho fatalism—early in the film, Accatone (Franco Citti), a small-time pimp, declares his headstone will read "Try It Yourself." When he tries to give up hustling, he tells his friends, "Today you'll sell your watch, tomorrow you'll sell your gold chain and in a week you'll not have eyes to cry with." Pasolini's film, however, still draws its images from a traditional religious and artistic culture (in particular through its references to Giotto and Masaccio). That repository of symbols and citations has been lost in *Gomorrah*, whose denizens identify far more with sports (nearly everyone decked out in global team wear), their generic tattoos, piercings, and attitude copied from television and the movies. The loss of traditional culture is reminiscent of Gianni Amelio's *Stolen Children* (1992) and *L'America* (1994). Though somewhat gentler dystopias, Amelio's films also show a country surrendering to consumerism: whether it's a mother pimping her school-age girl in *Stolen Children* or *L'America*'s shabby businessmen exploiting Albanian bureaucracy to set up a fake shoe factory.

This is disaster capitalism on a small scale. What Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine* (Metropolitan Books, 2007) identifies as the tactic of "putting a society into collective shock" following a natural or man-made calamity is the day-to-day state of life in *Gomorrah*. As Klein notes, this idea borrows from torture techniques, specifically the disorientation that comes from a "violent rupture" (various forms of sense deprivation) that deprives prisoners from making sense of the world around them. The idea is for people to "give up things they would otherwise fiercely protect." For those with a mediated connection to the syndicate, like Franco, this means justifying his profitable enterprise as a solution to pre-existing problems (helping farmers out of debt by buying their land), but also fobbing off personal responsibility on things beyond his control (the chromium and asbestos by-products).

Although on the surface *Gomorrah*'s mobsters appear to want power and prestige, their true goal is devastation. As Saviano notes, the aim of every true man of power is to lose it all. This, surely, is what is finally so disturbing in the film—and reminiscent of Bertrand Russell's observation during World War I that he had "supposed people liked money better than anything else, but . . . discovered that they liked destruction even better.".

MEGAN RATNER's work appears in *Film Comment* and *Cineaste*.

DVD DATA *Gomorrah*. Director: Matteo Garrone. © 2008 Fandango Srl. Publisher: Optimum Home Entertainment (U.K.). £19.98, 2 discs

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HALF PAGE

INTERVIEW WITH JIA ZHANG-KE

During summer 2008, I had the good fortune to meet Jia Zhang-ke at a conference in Shanghai devoted to André Bazin. We met briefly again at the New York Film Festival where he presented *24 City*. By happenstance I was in Beijing when *24 City* received one of its first public screenings in China at the Pamirs Cultural Festival in late October. I was invited to make some remarks about Jia's work and then to conduct a public interview with the director, who brought with him his screenwriter, the poet Zhai Yongming. Professor Xu Jing translated my remarks for the occasion and helped me prepare my questions.

Dudley Andrew: I couldn't help but notice a green tinge to the image of *24 City*. This could have been from the video projector, but I remember it also appeared on the screen at the Ziegfield theater during the New York Film Festival. Is this the color of China's soul, while its body becomes more garish every day with new neon buildings, advertisements, and screens? In *The World* [2004], we have brilliant animated sequences but I remember the color of the hospital waiting room; under the fluorescent lighting it had a sickly green hue, like fireflies' light.

Jia Zhang-ke: That greenish tinge did not come from a bad video projector. Thanks to digital technology we were able to mix that color into the film during post-production. In fact, this greenish tinge started to appear as early as my second film *Platform* [2000]. In its first shot a few hundred peasants stand in front of a green wall waiting for a performance to begin one evening in 1979. The green color occupies the entire screen. In fact, this color comes from my memory of life in the late 1970s and 80s, when many families in northern China painted the lower parts of their interior walls in green as high as one meter. To a child who was short, as I was, that green was the color I met everyday. Moreover, the color not only appeared on the walls of homes but also in all kinds of workplaces. Everywhere, in hospitals, offices, classrooms, all sorts of public places had their walls painted this color. When you went into state-run factories, you would see the green color on those machines and walls. To me, this green color comes from real life. It represents my memory about that old system, the China that dates from more than a decade ago certainly. And the most important thing is that it still exists.

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In *The World*, when we come to The World Park, as you pointed out, we can see there is a very bright, glamorous side of China. But there is another color [green] and another space existing in China. Those work units and state institutions still exist. The two systems are in transition. The new has not entirely taken up the space whereas the old has not yet withdrawn to some distant corner of history. So there they are together, side by side. In *The World* and *24 City* you can still see that greenish tinge. I constantly asked my cinematographer to work with me so as to turn up the green.

***24 City*, whose title comes from classical verse, contains numerous citations from poems. I was glad you included "Spilt Milk upon a Stone," for Yeats is surely my favorite poet. I also loved the surrealist one in which the factory becomes an enormous eyeball and the laboring workers its pupil. These citations, plus the written topics that introduce each chapter, together with the three distinct kinds of music, stand firm like girders, while the building is shown to crumble and memories roll out of the mouths of these people who themselves are changing. Did you mean to provide such classical literary structure so as to measure or give meaning to ephemeral modern experience? Like James Joyce in *Ulysses*, for instance?**

Before we started to shoot *24 City*, I had discussions with Zhai Yongming and decided that there should be a lot of poems in this film. It would be a film full of words. Indeed later on during the shooting, it was through words that we aimed to reveal memory and the past. We also wanted to use poetry to evoke certain feelings, the kind of poetry that can resonate with ordinary speech. I have this strong feeling that contemporary mainstream films depend increasingly on action, which gets faster and faster all the time. But people have complex feelings that can often be more accurately and clearly expressed through language. So why not make a movie that returns to words? Why don't we let words bring their lives back to those people? I selected Ouyang Jianghe's poem "Glass Factory," the one that talks about the factory being the eyeball, and also a poem by Wan Xia. Yeats's poem was chosen by Zhai Yongming. I was very touched by these poems.

Zhai Yongming: Yeats is my favorite poet too. He is the one who has perhaps influenced me the most. I have been reading his poems all my life. When we were writing the script, Jia Zhang-ke talked about using poems to divide the screenplay into chapters. He talked about a transitional shot

Jia Zhang-ke during filming of *24 City*

Courtesy The Cinema Guild.

to connect two stories: an explosion in the factory, which, after the smoke settles, shifts to the scene of the youngest generation. Although at the time I had not seen the filmed images, I could sense the highly poetic nature of that scene. Yeats's "Spilt Milk" just popped into my head. I thought it fit perfectly here; no other lines could substitute for them. [This poem and the explosion have been excised in some of the DVD copies that circulate.] I believe among Chinese directors, Jia Zhang-ke is the most familiar with poetry. He has read a great deal; he selected much of the poetry himself. I was responsible for just part of this job. Dudley Andrew is absolutely right—Jia Zhang-ke is a poet of cinema.

Jia Zhang-ke may be a poet, but he is a very socially concerned one. The nine characters in *24 City* represent nine different roles in the factory community. They form the synchronic axis of the social unit. And it seems they comprise five or six generations, making up the temporal axis. I return again to Joyce's structure for *Ulysses*, a novel in eighteen chapters, not one more and not one less. So let me ask: if one "actor" had performed poorly, or if you realized the section had been badly written, could you have discarded it and kept just eight? Does the film require all nine so that the structure of the whole picture makes sense?

Jia Zhang-ke: in fact the nine characters fall into two groups. When I came to this factory to interview people, we got in touch with over one hundred workers and shot the interviews of about fifty of them. We finally used five stories in the film. The other four characters are fictional: Lü Liping's character who lost her child on the trip to Chengdu, the Shanghai girl played by Joan Chen, Chen Jianbin's character who tells his story about growing up in the Cultural Revolution, and Zhao Tao's character who represents the youngest generation. I think the nine characters become one when put together. I like the group portrait because I feel that

it gives one realism and complexity. Because of my decision to film a group portrait, I needed a lot of people to appear in the film. On the one hand, there is an intertextual relationship among these nine characters. They run a relay of narrating history chronologically from the 1950s till today. This creates a sense of temporal continuity. On the other hand, the storytelling, which unfolds moment by moment, spans fifty years of time. I like such complexity of time.

I appreciate what you said about the "emptiness" in films. Among the fifty people whom I interviewed, some told stories that contain very intense dramatic moments in their personal lives. I eliminated all of these when I was editing. What I left is common experience, which to most Chinese is common knowledge. These experiences are not very idiosyncratic or unique. But precisely because of this, the film can offer Chinese audiences a vaster imaginary space, into which they can project their own experience and stories. What I filmed are not individual cases but collective memories. Moreover, the film also contains many moments of silence, in fact a silent moment for each character. Such moments complement the narration.

You once said that the people of China haven't really changed despite the transformation of the economy and landscape they live in. You also said that you yourself have changed little. Hence your films are consistent; they move at the same pace, and look at things with the same tone. Yet one change strikes me: since the period of *Pickpocket* [1997], Chinese culture has become photo-crazy. One sees cameras everywhere today; and people are used to being photographed. Does this not affect how you shoot them? And might this not affect how you want your film to look, as you strive to distinguish your images from the general glut?

When I was making my earlier films, especially *Unknown Pleasures* [2002], I felt that Chinese people had begun to lead an image-filled life; that is to say, people were taking lots of photos and at the same time being frequently photographed. One of the things that struck me most was that no one was surprised or tried to shun me when I carried my DV to the scene. I could capture the situation in its nearly natural state. This really fascinated me. When it came to *24 City*, I had people sit in front of the camera which I let run continuously for fifty minutes in silence. This is nothing like taking still photos. For the most important thing is that, in that silence and through the camera, we are trying to capture the subtle changes of expression, to display the intense activities of the inner world, as you just said, to look for certain kinds of traces and vestiges. I also had a strange feeling when I was shooting the portrait images after the interviews. During those three to five minutes of shooting, I felt as if we were mourning silently for the lives and the stories of the past. Later it became a ritual in our shooting. For me these portraits are not just people's faces nor some form complementary to their narration, nor even a mere ritual. For through that ritual we sense the many lives that have been ignored, ordinary people's lives ignored. We hope that through time, through silence, and through this ritual, the film can help these people achieve some recognition.

Is *24 City* the reverse side of *The World*? In *The World* there is apparent freedom for characters to roam throughout China; while in the military aircraft factory in *24 City* everyone was confined. Yet this locked society is remembered fondly by many as a place where people communicated with and helped each other. Whereas in *The World*, everyone seems rather alone and homeless. Can there be a Chinese modernity that doesn't result in imitating western social alienation? Do the Chinese imagine a *24 City* as a "cherished hibiscus," a utopia both free and humane?

To answer this question, I have to return to what happened before the shooting of *The World*. I started to write the script in 2003. Writing that script had a lot to do with SARS. Before the outbreak of SARS, I was living a life at a very busy and fast pace like many other Chinese. The entire country, perhaps the entire world, was like that, especially in big cities. But SARS suddenly put a stop to that. I had nothing to do in Beijing and I couldn't leave the city. When I was roaming around in the empty city, I discovered speed. I had not been aware of the speed of the life we had been living before, since I was right in the midst of it. Now SARS put the brakes on this. I suddenly realized how peculiar our fast-paced life was. So if you talk about the new experience, this consciousness of speed, the anxiety about it and the attention to it, is something new. When I was walking in the city (during the SARS scare), I started to notice the advertisements on both sides of the streets. There were lots of ads for apartment buildings and new housing developments. One apartment building complex was called Garden of Rome, another called Forest of Vancouver, yet another Water Town of Venice. All the apartment buildings seemed associated with some foreign city. This striking discovery developed in me a new consciousness (of what would become *The World*).

The World is indeed very different from *24 City*, revealing quite distinct aspects of China. *The World* is about leaving and breaking away from bondage, from family. It is a depiction of a new group of people, those who migrate to cities. They escape two things. First they leave family and hometown. Even today family and kinship remain the core of Chinese life. When such people abandon the countryside and come to the city, they apparently become liberated individuals. Now, second, this also means that they escape another restrictive system, that of the state institution. They

Coming to the city

Curtesy The Cinema Gild.

escape the system of state-run factories and work units. Those factory dorms in *24 City*, and the factory itself, are very much like the places that the characters in *The World* have left. Everyone in *24 City* is embedded within this social structure called the work unit, which after 1949 reorganized the Chinese people's interpersonal relationships. When I first came to that factory, I was struck by its disconnection from contemporary Chinese society. Yes, it was a part of it; it belonged to it; but it was also totally disconnected from our normal impression of China. Outside the factory walls, the place had everything—travel agency, store, disco hall, bar, Internet café, everything. However, once you got into the homes of the factory workers and looked at their furniture, their interior decoration, their bathrooms, their photos, all the things on display, time seems to have stopped in the late 1970s or 80s. Anyway it is a totally different world from outside the wall.

And so to me, these two films make up my two jobs. With *The World* I want to tell people that there is a China that's being renovated and refurbished. With *24 City* I want to tell them that there is also a China still locked in memory.

Earlier you mentioned the first scene of *Platform*, which takes place around 1980 when there were so few chances for personal expression. Evidently even buying tight pants caused a stir. Today there are all kinds of clothes styles in China, and many films, not just your own, express personal feelings. Yet *Platform* concludes in disappointment, as do all your films. How do you explain the achievement of a society of self-expression that you have witnessed in your own lifetime, while your own expressions convey loss and disappointment?

Actually I think that this feeling of disappointment is not the result of historical occurrences, the kinds of tragedies and problems brought about by bad politics and ideology. It's a more general feeling. For example in Buddhism, existence is supposed to be a process of life and death, suffering and illness. The fact is that things like aging and illness won't disappear just because we have an improved ideological atmosphere or fewer pressures at other social levels. So from this perspective, from the perspective of Buddhist belief, I do not have a very sanguine outlook on life itself. As to the issue of artistic expression, this exists in every era. I feel that from the very outset of the "Opening and Reform" policy in the late 1970s, we have always tried to make sure that our expressions are personal, coming from deep inside, from a private perspective, and not dependent on some mainstream discourse. And there are numerous ways of expressing oneself. Gradually art and culture have opened up to allow individualistic language of expression, especially in cinema. We know that the habitual way of managing Chinese cinema and its production model was based upon state monopoly. But since the 1990s, which saw the birth of Chinese independent cinema, to today when it has firmly established itself, there have been films that are a result of individual observation, reflection, and representation of society. I think there have been enormous transformations and progress made during this past decade. We know that in Japan in the 1960s and 70s, there was Super 8 filmmaking; these personal perspectives helped to preserve the memory of that period. However, when Chinese try to recall certain important historical moments from their past, such as the Cultural Revolution, we find nothing in the film archive that shows concern for ordinary people. We only have official images and newsreels.

Then finally we started to have independent films in the 1990s. I think that the past eighteen years have left us very interesting works. Most of them are mature and personal expressions and representations. This is a great improvement. In the end, I want to say, China has been doing one major thing since late Qing, and that is modernizing the nation. To me, the core value of modernization is a belief in the respect for individual freedom and individual expression. This is something that needs to be defended.

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HAIDEE WASSON

Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide by Henry Jenkins

Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home by Barbara Klinger

Convergence Culture by Henry Jenkins is an important, readable work about fan culture, emergent technologies, and the ever-adaptive media industries. Comprised largely of previously published research, it addresses a broad audience about major shifts in contemporary culture. Jenkins argues that new media technologies have allowed fans to become more visible and influential on industry structures and media content: fans and their varied activities constitute for Jenkins sites of democratic possibility, facilitating fundamental changes in cultural production.

"Convergence culture" names a transitional but widespread condition "where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (2). Jenkins takes as his starting point three key concepts: media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence. Proceeding by case study, he brings these concepts to bear on particular fan communities and cross-media phenomena—*Survivor* and *American Idol*, *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, Harry Potter. (The penultimate chapter examines the 2004 presidential election.) While Jenkins discusses developments within specific media—television, film, print, and the Web—key to his argument is the contention that the great bulk of media content and fan activity are no longer confined to a single technological outlet or a simple media practice. For him, the idea of convergence culture is diametrically opposed to previous conceptual frameworks employed for understanding the media industries. He eschews terms such as "mass media" and companion ideas about duped audiences, mindless distraction, and passive viewers. Convergence culture is first and foremost a polyglot development rife with possibility yet rich in contradiction. It is undergirded by corporate consolidation, on the one hand, and by an unprecedented multiplication of channels, points of access, and means of production, on the other.

Contradictions notwithstanding, there is a certain utopianism to this book, as Jenkins himself readily admits—an "every important story gets told" (3) sensibility which informs the case studies. Throughout, often insufficiently conceptualized ideas are celebrated, such as increased fan "activity," viewer "participation," and "grassroots production." These terms are offered as necessary corrections to equally troubling and often overly simple concepts of passivity and mindlessness that have long dominated academic understanding of commercial film and media audiences. Yet this inversion of these older models can, at times, distract from what is so important about this book. Jenkins provides analyses of mainstream, highly successful, and extremely popular media phenomena. Despite what often feels like a G-rated analysis of G-rated media, there can be no doubting that such things must be studied and with the kind of nuanced, at times ethnographic, approach that *Convergence Culture* supplies. In short, this book goes a long way toward helping us understand the nature of cross-platform media entities, the complicated methods by which people make meaning of them, and new models of creativity (and corporate ingenuity) that accompany them. Jenkins also reminds us that previous models of discrete media and textual forms no longer serve to help us understand emergent narrative, content, genre, and characters.

While Jenkins's overview of the media industries and especially their horizontal integration is not new, he is admirably open to what fans contribute to contemporary media. His examination of fan activities in terms of leisure, pleasure, fantasy, and imagination yields deeper insights into the whole of media culture. Moreover, assessing fan culture also requires integrating the complex dynamics of consumerism, emergent media technologies, and the resilience of modern cultural industries. For Jenkins, what is at stake extends beyond debates in media scholarship. The real hope is that better understanding of media culture will lead to more progressive and democratic media cultures.

This book is also a valuable reminder of how celluloid no longer has a monopoly on moving-image technologies, and how discrete texts and linear stories are only one way that films get made, circulated, and prolonged. Those committed to a more historically grounded perspective on the dynamics that Jenkins traces, such as earlier intermedial aesthetics and activity, as well as participatory and do-it-yourself cultures, will have to look elsewhere. This is also true for readers interested in sustained criticism of corporate cultures, new technologies, and global media conglomerates, or in the gendered, class-based, and ethnocentric aspects of big media and localized fan activity. Jenkins leaves the work of investigating the

persistence of cultural hierarchies, and the limits to the idea of limitless texts, largely to his colleagues. Nevertheless, this is an accessible primer on emergent media, corporate change, and fan activity.

A good complement to *Convergence Culture*, Barbara Klinger's *Beyond the Multiplex* also investigates how previously distinct media are finding new life in alliances with other technologies, institutions, industries, and viewer/user interfaces. Whereas Jenkins explores the hopeful and even redemptive aspects of our current situation, Klinger's writing is more skeptical, working to identify the ideological force of industrial trends as well as bottom-up uses of media artifacts. Her focus is also in some ways more narrow than Jenkins's, concentrating on what she takes to be new permutations of cinema (rather than media per se) emanating outward from the movie screen toward smaller, portable, and more adaptive screens.

In examining the dynamics of the contemporary home theater, she alerts us to material changes in the conditions of watching films. An array of technologies now shape the movie-watching experience, making it at once more private (an audience of one) but also more implicated in an ever-expanding assemblage of gadgets (DVDs, PVRs, computers), as well as an increasing number of institutions (family, play/gaming, education). This, among other things, has yielded a new set of terms as experts and amateurs alike scramble to make sense of the splintering of cinema's technologies, modes of production, and ways of watching: cybercinema, microcinema, click flicks, gigaplex, e-cinema, pocket cinema, cinema wear.

In order to fully explore this situation, *Beyond the Multiplex* contains chapters dedicated to such recent phenomena as high-end home theaters, video and DVD collecting, cable movie classics, repeat viewing, and film parodies. The book also includes concise histories of domestic moving-image technologies, beginning with television but largely focusing on the changes ushered in by video, cable, and the World Wide Web. These supply useful context for the book's case studies. Klinger carefully maps new permutations of the film industry (where film studios are owned by electronics companies), of movie-watching (where films are viewed in fragments, repeatedly and in privacy), and of everyday rituals (where home design, gourmet food, and art cinema make for an ideal Friday night). Klinger examines each of these developments with enviable rigor and care. For her, technological change is always also social, political, cultural, and multidirectional. Throughout, Klinger maintains a critical eye on recent shifts, attending to the ideological implications of these developments, identifying the ways in which they often reinforce old and unfortunately predictable tendencies. Her analyses also remind us of the ways that cinema and home have a mutual history in relation to the phenomena of leisure, consumerism, aestheticized environments, and fantasies of escape—a series of insights that will no doubt only become more important.

Both *Convergence Culture* and *Beyond the Multiplex* take an expansive approach to defining moving images—not single, unchanging, discrete cultural entities, but evolving, complex ones with long, complicated lives. This insight allows both authors to pursue salient ideas about texts and audiences. Both authors recognize the new forms of creative activity and social networking that are emerging. In each book, the mass audience gives way here to a much more complex, organic, thinking, feeling agglomeration of people that is always to a degree in formation. Compared to Jenkins, Klinger does not entirely buy into the rhetoric of participation, arguing throughout that user "activity" is also a corporate ideal and therefore a concept laden with very particular values: a retreat from rather than participation in public life, the aestheticization of the film experience, and the reassertion of class hierarchies through connoisseurship, art appreciation, and bourgeois lifestyles. Klinger also importantly gives more significance to the gendered dynamics of recent technological and cultural shifts.

Klinger reminds us that hers is not primarily a story about destabilizing dominant or traditional industry norms, but a story about the changing conditions in which conventional and emergent ideas and practices of cinema are being rearticulated—both to reaffirm the familiar and to generate the unfamiliar. The home is presented here as a distinct and complex site, replete with its own genres, modes of reception, and viewer/user configurations. Because of her balanced approach and thorough research, this book will remain required reading for years to come. *Beyond the Multiplex* is engaged, original, and determined to challenge staid models of textuality, spectatorship, audiences, and cinema institutions. It reminds us that cinema's alliance with the home and so-called new media is still a largely untapped but foundational site for thinking about movies. © 2009 Haidee Wasson

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BOOK DATA Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU Press, 2006. $29.95 cloth. 336 pages.

Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. $60.00 cloth; $26.95 paper. 324 pages.

CHARLES MALAND

Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider by Brian Neve
On the Waterfront by Leo Braudy

The lead-up to the last Oscar ceremony of the twentieth century, held on March 21, 1999, was notable for an argument about the decision of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' board of governors to grant an honorary award to Elia Kazan, director of such films as *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), *On the Waterfront* (1954), and *A Face in the Crowd* (1957). The controversy revolved largely around Kazan's decision in April 1952 to name names, before the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities, of former associates who had been members of the Communist Party. The Hollywood Left, particularly those associated with figures like Abraham Polonsky, who were blacklisted during the era, generally disapproved—some vituperatively—while others, like anti-Stalinist liberal Arthur Schlesinger Jr., critiqued the critics and defended both Kazan's decision to testify in 1952 and his selection for the award. Those who attended the ceremonies seemed deeply divided over the selection, though not always in predictable ways: I remember watching the ceremony and noting how some people, like Warren Beatty (who owed Kazan a debt for a break early in his career), applauded when Kazan took the stage while others—including Steven Spielberg—sat on their hands. More than fifty years after the event, Kazan's decision still inflamed passions.

One effect of Kazan's testimony was to avoid the blacklist and thus extend his career as a director through the release of *The Last Tycoon* in 1976. His life and body of work have generated considerable attention from critics and commentators over the years. Although Andrew Sarris pigeonholed Kazan in his "Less than Meets the Eye" group in *The American Cinema* (1968), books by Roger Teilleur (1966), Michel Ciment (1973), Thomas Pauly (1983), Lloyd Michaels (1985), and Richard Schickel (2005) have all paid careful attention to Kazan and his career.

Two additional recent books—Brian Neve's well-researched and documented critical study of Kazan's filmmaking career, *Elia Kazan: the Cinema of an American Outsider,* and Leo Braudy's *On the Waterfront* (in the BFI Film Classics series)—offer new insights and perspectives on Kazan as a filmmaker. Neve's previous book, *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (Routledge, 1992), traced a generation of filmmakers whose politics were shaped by the Depression experience and who began working in movies in the 1940s. That generation included Orson Welles, Nicholas Ray, Joseph Losey, Abraham Polonsky, and, of course, Kazan. Many were blacklisted and/or became exiles. *Elia Kazan* narrows the focus: in Neve's words, the book is "a study of the film work of Elia Kazan (from 1945 to 1976) in industrial, cultural, and political contexts" which examines "the director's role as part of the changing *process* of filmmaking, with particular regard to the transition between the studio era of the forties and the changed role of the studios, as predominantly financers and distributors of independently produced films, in the fifties" (1).

Following an introduction that traces some of the formative influences in Kazan's life before starting to direct in Hollywood in 1945, and reviews some previous work on Kazan, Neve structures the book in nine chapters, discussing all nineteen films Kazan directed, starting with *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* in 1945. Chapter 1 explores Kazan's films at Fox, where Kazan often worked with Darryl F. Zanuck on social problem films like *Gentleman's Agreement* and *Pinky* (1949), and documentary films like *Panic in the Streets* (1950). Chapter 2 examines *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and *Viva Zapata!* (1952), chapter 3 dissects Kazan and his HUAC experience, and chapter 4 concentrates on perhaps the central film in Kazan's *oeuvre*, *On the Waterfront*. Chapter 5 treats Kazan as the producer–director of *East of Eden* (1955) and *Baby Doll* (1956), while chapter 6 explores Kazan's "journeys in the American south"—*A Face in the Crowd* and *Wild River* (1960). Kazan's adaptations of *Splendor in the Grass* (1961) and of his own novel, *America, America* (1963), provide the focus of chapter 7. Following a discussion in chapter 8 of *The Arrangement* (1969), also based on a Kazan novel, and *The Visitors* (1972), a low-budget film touching on Vietnam that he did in collaboration with his son, Christopher Kazan, in chapter 9 Neve treats Kazan's work with Robert De Niro in *The Last Tycoon*, and adds a brief coda.

The book has a number of strengths. It is thoroughly researched and makes judicious use of previous scholarship on Kazan, of Kazan's own writings and interviews, and of a wide range of archival material, not least the Kazan papers at Wesleyan University and information on the Production Code Administration (PCA) in the Academy's Margaret Herrick Library. This results in some telling detail. Received wisdom has linked Kazan's work to Italian neo-realism, but Neve makes the link more concrete: he notes that Kazan endorsed *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) in a flyer advertising the film's 1949 run, and he observes that *Open City* (1945) and *Paisà* (1946), which Kazan cited as having profound influence, were both shown in New York in 1948 and were celebrated for their

location shooting and use of nonprofessional actors (something Kazan himself did in *Panic in the Streets*). Neve is also insightful on the evolution of the director's political views. Kazan's justification of his decision to name names in 1952—essentially an anti-Stalinist liberal position—may have seemed shocking and abrupt to many of his contemporaries, but Neve discovered that Kazan quoted the anti-totalitarian conclusion of Schlesinger's *The Vital Center* in his preparatory notes to *Panic in the Streets*, suggesting that Kazan had already come to something like an anti-Stalinist liberal position as early as 1949, when Schlesinger's book was first published. Similarly, according to Neve, Kazan sought in *Viva Zapata!*—released before his HUAC testimony—to present a left/progressive ideology that was also anti-Stalinist. One could give more examples of Neve's insightful use of archival material, as in his discussions of how Kazan wrangled with the PCA in such films as *Streetcar Named Desire* and *Baby Doll*, and how his systematic script notations—which draw on his experience as a theater director—provide us with insight into his themes and stylistic choices in each film.

The picture of Kazan that emerges in convincing detail from Neve's study is of a director whose vision of the world was shaped by the politics of the Depression era and complicated by the experience of the early Cold War years, which in turn led to rich and complex films from the mid-1950s on. Neve also demonstrates by close attention to Kazan's notebooks that he was particularly interested in character development and in nurturing actors to give rich and complex performances, a perspective affirmed in interviews by many performers who worked with him. In summing up, Neve writes that "Kazan's best work provides characters with both material and psychological contexts that are nuanced, grounded in real life and complex, while, in part by doing that, he helped further the slow demise of censorship and the Legion of Decency. His mature work, particularly in the period 1956–63, the ante-room of the sixties, provides one model (if only one model) of how others of the 'thirties' generations might have fared had they been able to have access to the American industry" (196).

The complexity that Neve discerns in Kazan's mature films is also evident to Leo Braudy in his volume on *On the Waterfront*. Focusing on the film generally rather than the director only, Braudy discusses its production history, including the complicated evolution of the script (starting with Malcolm Johnston's newspaper articles on waterfront crime and Arthur Miller's early involvement in the project, through the interplay between screenwriter Budd Schulberg and Kazan), as well as the interventions of the PCA staff. He also looks closely at the film itself, including Leonard Bernstein's score and Boris Kaufman's cinematography, aided by a generous number of captioned frame enlargments. In one appealing section in the book, Braudy discusses the importance of the film's on-location shooting. He reports on a visit he made in the late 1960s to try to find some of the locations and talk to people from Hoboken who had memories of the shooting of the film. Finally, observing how enthusiastically the film was received on its first release and how well its reputation has endured, Braudy speculates on the reasons for the movie's mythic power. Braudy emphasizes the centrality of the film in both Kazan and Brando's careers, its use of Method acting, which went on to influence modes of performance in both American and European films, and the ways in which the social concerns and controversies surrounding the film mirrored American anxieties in the era of Joseph McCarthy. Yet Braudy goes a step further. "The complexities of the film," he writes, "belie any easy equation between the political beliefs of its creators, the actions of its characters and the shape of its plot. Within the film itself is a kind of ambivalence about moral behaviour . . . and the difficulty of moral choices that gives it a resonance beyond the partisan politics of its day" (7). To Braudy, Terry Malloy is an antihero in the vein of Salinger's Holden Caulfield, Kerouac's Dean Moriarity, and any of a number of characters in the 1950s played by James Dean and Montgomery Clift. All, in Braudy's view, "illustrate the difficulty of maintaining one's identity and integrity amid the world's incoherence."

The stress in both books on the complexity and ambiguity in Kazan's films may not satisfy those who maintain an antipathy for the director because of his 1952 HUAC testimony. However, both Neve and Braudy note how powerfully they were affected by Kazan's mature films when they first encountered them in the 1950s and 60s; Braudy works as hard at making sense of *On the Waterfront* as Neve does at providing a rich overview of Kazan's directorial career in Hollywood, based on a careful and thorough review of the evidence now available to film scholars. For those interested in understanding Kazan and *On the Waterfront*, both of these books will be essential to consult. © 2009 Charles Maland

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BOOK DATA Brian Neve, *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider.* London: I. B. Tauris, 2008. $39.95 cloth. 256 pages.

Leo Braudy, *On the Waterfront.* London: BFI Film Classics, 2005. $14.95 paper. 88 pages.

FRANCIS G. COUVARES

Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration by Thomas Doherty

Any traversal of the history of Hollywood's internal censorship requires the author to answer a question: did the Production Code matter and in what way? The question generates several others: did the code actually change what appeared on the screen, or was it just a moralistic veil behind which the studios doled out mainstream entertainment with as much titillation as they thought the audience would bear? How were movies before, during, and after the code different from one another, and why? Why did the code come into being when it did, and exit from the scene when it did?

Unlike European scholars such as Richard Maltby (in *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus* [Scarecrow Press, 1983]) and other postmodernists who doubt that external pressure exerted much impact on the code—and therefore on the politics of representation and cultural production—most Americans who have conducted research into the Production Code Administration (PCA) papers and the records of the Legion of Decency and other pro-censorship groups have concluded that such influence did matter. Thomas Doherty is one of these. His new biography of Joseph Breen, the man who ran Hollywood's in-house censorship operation, shows just what the PCA did in response to both internal industry and external pro-censorship forces, and what the consequences of its actions were. The two best books on this subject, Gregory D. Black's *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), and the late Frank Walsh's *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (Yale University Press, 1996), will not be surpassed by this new work. But Doherty does offer important new insights into the internal politics of the PCA and its tricky relations with its mostly Catholic sponsors and its mostly Jewish bosses.

Of course, since it is a biography, the book also tells us much about Breen that we did not know. In the documentary *Hollywood Censored* (WGBH, 2000), I referred to Breen as "an altar boy with brass knuckles," but Doherty makes clear we should add, "and with terrible digestion." Breen's workaholic habits partly explain his success in riding herd over Hollywood's unruly studios, but they also reveal the extent to which he could not, literally, "stomach" the job. His Catholic certainties about morality may have armored him for external struggles but seemed not to protect him from internal ones. Doherty shows that Breen, who uttered unmistakably anti-Semitic sentiments in letters to Rev. Wilfred Parsons and others, clearly repented of such sins later in the 1930s, becoming a strong ally of Hollywood efforts to oppose racism and intolerance for the rest of his life. Breen also sometimes opposed his conservative Republican boss, Will Hays, on the dramatization of labor's struggle for rights and other causes critical of the business status quo. But on matters of sex, family, and respect for religious authority, Breen ever remained the "Victorian Irishman," as Doherty dubs him. Although this biography adds detail to our knowledge of Breen's management of the PCA, it does not substantially alter our understanding of the relationship between the Catholic Church and Hollywood in the 1930s.

Doherty effectively charts the PCA's endgame. Like most scholars, he explains that the rise of television and the Department of Justice's break-up of the studio-exhibition monopoly affected not only the profitability of the business but also the logic of its internal censorship. Doherty convincingly argues that the rise of "art cinema" played a larger role in the abandonment of censorship than many have granted it. Not just a marginalized ghetto for the aesthetic elite, art cinema subverted the case for censorship among crucially important opinion-makers in the press, the academy, and to a degree in the judiciary.

In the end, Doherty hedges the question about whether the PCA mattered. Although his narrative shows that Breen's office decisively shaped American movie culture, his final thoughts sound more ambivalent. Perhaps Hollywood's single-minded pursuit of profit would in any case have trimmed whatever radical impulses its writers and directors harbored. Perhaps the conservative values of middle-class America would have reacted violently to gangsters, fallen women, and dissidents on the screen, and led to even more state—and worse, federal—censorship. Maybe Hays and Breen just codified and administered the industry's only conceivable policy: give them what they want as long as it avoids offending the best-organized groups. We will never know the answers, and that, of course, is the problem with this and other experiments in censorship.

A final note: Doherty's prose is brisk, even breezy. Sometimes he seems to be channeling *Variety* in his attempts to sound unacademic. The reader may judge how effective, or annoying, this is. But if he or she is unfamiliar with the subject and wants to know how Breen and the Catholics took over and then lost Hollywood's moral compass, this book is a good place to start. © 2009 Francis G. Couvares

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BOOK DATA Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. $21.50 cloth. 440 pages.

ERIC SCHAEFER

Freedom and Entertainment: Rating the Movies in the Age of New Media by Stephen Vaughn
The Naked Truth: Why Hollywood Doesn't Make X-Rated Movies by Kevin S. Sandler

The motion picture rating system in the United States recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary and has now outlived by several years the old Production Code (1930–68) that it replaced. It has become such a fixture of the entertainment landscape that its alphabet-soup recipe for protecting children and the delicate sensibilities of some adults is now largely disregarded unless the increasingly rare controversy wells up. These two books both have the ratings system as their main focus and use the papers of Richard Heffner as their primary source material. From 1974 to 1994 Heffner led the Classification and Ratings Administration (CARA), charged with applying a G, PG, R, or X (and later PG-13 and NC-17) rating to movies released in the United States. While documentation about the Production Code was opened two decades ago, resulting in volumes directly about the code and its administration, and enhancing hundreds of other books and articles, information about CARA remains tightly held. Despite constant goading by longtime Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) chief Jack Valenti, Heffner never signed a confidentiality agreement, and his papers and oral history are now open at Columbia University.

Despite their surface similarities, the two books are quite different. In *Freedom and Entertainment*, Stephen Vaughn essays a broad approach to the regulation of media content. In fact his subtitle (*Rating Movies in the Age of New Media*), is not entirely accurate as he takes up not only film ratings, but television ratings and the V-chip, and the ratings of records and CDs as well. Vaughn also slips into a two-chapter digression on pornography—movies that were almost never submitted to CARA and by the early 1980s largely eschewed the self-applied X. Sections on the ham-handed Meese Commission and the awkward alliance between anti-porn feminists and the Christian Right don't deal with ratings at all, though they do offer an overview of the social and political context in which CARA had to operate (something Kevin Sandler tends to gloss over). Vaughn emphasizes technological change, and the way it altered the content and reception of entertainment, and thus its control. At times this account is convincing (improved special-effects capacities, the diffusion of home video), at other times less so (color television, the development of the Steadicam). Another running theme in *Freedom and Entertainment* is the proliferation of "media effects" studies in the 1970s and 80s, which purported to show the negative effects of media violence on children and adults. But beyond Heffner's evident sympathy with some of these studies (as opposed to Valenti's blanket dismissals), there is a lack of detail on how they affected the ratings process. In his conclusion, Vaughn calls for a "comprehensive, clearly written history of media-effects research" (263) as a contribution to debates over media sex and violence—although the cynic in me is tempted to speculate that like most effects studies, any such history would conclude that "additional research is necessary."

In contrast to Vaughn's all-encompassing approach, Sandler offers a more focused perspective. He argues that the decline of the code and the rise of CARA brought with it a shift from a commitment to produce "harmless entertainment" to the creation of "responsible entertainment." That change was accompanied by the necessity to police the boundary between what he terms "the incontestable R" and the X (later the NC-17), which was framed as "irresponsible." Sandler explains: "the MPAA could subscribe to a framework of creative license but still function according to an affirmative cultural model of entertainment," all the while "publicly denying its role as a censor" (46). In other words, the mainstream film industry attempted to have its cake and eat it too. And it could, as long as the delicate balance between CARA, major production companies, theater owners, and various public constituencies was maintained. When that equilibrium faltered, contestation and controversy resulted. The strength of Sandler's work lies in his case studies of these moments, such as *Cruising* (1980) and *Basic Instinct* (1992), and the run-ins with perennial gadflies like Brian De Palma and the Weinstein brothers. This is accomplished through an analysis of Heffner's notes and recollections, differing versions of films available on video and DVD, and press accounts of ratings scuffles. Tensions between the MPAA, CARA, and filmmakers are sharply drawn in these sections, and their attempts to exploit each other for individual or institutional gain are clear. Throughout *The Naked Truth* Sandler does an excellent job of dismantling much of the mythology surrounding CARA and the ratings system.

FRANCIS G. COUVARES is E. Dwight Salmon Professor of History and American Studies at Amherst College, and co-author of *Interpretations of American History* (Simon and Schuster, 8th edition, 2008).

BOOK DATA Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. $21.50 cloth. 440 pages.

ERIC SCHAEFER

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With Heffner consistently pushed into the shadows by Valenti, who insisted that the ratings system speak with one voice (his own), it's not surprising that Valenti comes across as the most interesting figure in both books. He was the little man with the big job of protecting the interests of the movie industry, and he possessed the outsize personality that was up to the task. His background in public relations and his tendency to become a true believer made him a master of manipulation. Valenti's powers of persuasion with filmmakers, politicians, the public, and the press made him the single most influential figure in Hollywood for almost four decades. Both authors acknowledge the limitations of their studies, but until the post-1968 MPAA and/or CARA papers are opened to researchers, or until a critical biography of Valenti comes along, they will be very useful to anyone interested in the American film business in the last forty years. Readers would do well to read the books as complements; Vaughn's for his broad, contextual take, Sandler's for his close analysis and specificity. © 2009 Eric Schaefer

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BOOK DATA Stephen Vaughn, *Freedom and Entertainment: Rating the Movies in the Age of New Media.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. $73.00 cloth; $27.99 paper. 352 pages.

Kevin S. Sandler, *The Naked Truth: Why Hollywood Doesn't Make X-Rated Movies.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007. $68.00 cloth; $23.95 paper. 252 pages.

RONALD WILSON

Dying to Belong: Gangster Movies in Hollywood and Hong Kong by Martha P. Nochimson

The apt title of Eugene Rosow's *Born to Lose: The Gangster Film in America* (1978) encapsulates the essence of the gangster protagonist in cinema—no matter how hard or how violent the means to material success, the gangster is doomed from the start. Such characters' ultimate downfall is a defining principle of the genre. Martha P. Nochimson's recent book, *Dying to Belong*, reaffirms this idea, but adds something new, suggesting that the gangster protagonist is essentially an aspiring outsider, an individual whose attempts to become a part of something ends in disaster. Nochimson's study is unusual in presenting a cross-cultural account of gangster identity (although there is some comparable work, for example Jonathan Munby's *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Caesar to Touch of Evil* [University of Chicago Press, 1999] and *Mob Culture: Hidden Histories of the American Gangster Film*, edited by Lee Grievesen, Esther Sonnet, and Peter Stanfield [Rutgers University Press, 2005]). *Dying to Belong* considers "the core tensions in Hollywood and Hong Kong gangster films between immigrant reality and the deeply cherished central fable of modern democracies that promise immigrant (and other) outsiders that they can become social insiders" (6). Therefore, as she points out in the introduction, Nochimson only analyzes films from Hong Kong or America if they are centrally concerned with immigrant protagonists. These gangsters buy into the dream of immigration leading to success and social inclusion. But any such promise is denied; ostracism occurs instead.

Nochimson's six chapters alternate between discussions of Hong Kong and Hollywood. Chapter 2 examines the evolution of the gangster identity in Hollywood from D.W. Griffith's *Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912) to Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990). The gangster's constructed identity, Nochimson asserts, has developed in ways that reflect historical changes in the United States. The author deftly follows the evolutionary development of the gangster protagonist from an anomaly within the modern urban world (*Regeneration*, 1915) to the self-assertive, pugnacious individual who attempts to become a part of that modern world (*Goodfellas*). The author's readings of *Public Enemy* (1931), *The Godfather* (1972), and *Goodfellas* are especially revealing on the dynamics of gangster identity. What I found particularly pleasing and also revelatory was Nochimson's inclusion of a little known Warner Bros. film, *Blondie Johnson* (1933), within her examination of the Hollywood gangster. This film features a typical rise-and-fall narrative—only this time the gangster is a woman.

Chapter 3 changes the focus to the Hong Kong gangster protagonist whose immigrant identity partakes of a Taoist code. Here the focus falls on John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* and its sequel (1986, 1987), the *Young and Dangerous* series directed by Andrew Lau (1996–2000), and the revisionist Triad gangster film, *A Hero Never Dies* (1998), directed by Johnnie To. In each case, Nochimson draws out the conflict between immigrant aspiration and Taoist virtues, especially loyalty and brotherhood within Triads. Nochimson's analysis is both salient and informative, especially in her explication of the paradoxical fusion of traditional morality (especially ideas of duty) and criminal organization adapted to modern society. Chow Yun-Fat's Mark in *A Better Tomorrow* provides an example of this Taoist/Triad dualism, a man who professes loyalty and honor, and yet is destined "to pay the price of the killer" (78). Nochimson goes on, in chapter 4, to discusses the gangster's destabilization in relation to urban space. She

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analyzes the immigrant protagonist's encounter with what the chapter title calls the "Void of Material Success" within this environment by examining the visual imagery in several works, including *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) and *Miller's Crossing* (1990). These films feature immigrant gangster protagonists whose identity is threatened by consumerism. The Hong Kong films examined in this section, particularly *Too Many Ways to be No. 1* (1997) and *The Mission* (1999), show how an experience of dislocation encroaches on Triad members' attempt to hold to traditional values. The final chapter, "East Meets West," examines what is argued to be an intersection of the Taoist gangster of Hong Kong films with the Hollywood immigrant protagonist in *The Sopranos* (1999–2007), *Gangs of New York* (2002), and the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy (2002–03). Nochimson asserts that these post-millennium television series and films illustrate an artistic juncture of Hong Kong and Hollywood and provide additional insight into the problematic world of their immigrant gangster protagonist. "Some not yet fully defined cross-cultural alchemy is in progress," she writes, "appropriating superficial aspects of Hong Kong movies and 'Hollywoodizing' them, each of the two traditions of gangster films is digging into its own deep-seated cultural roots" (184–85).

Nochimson's focus on gangster protagonists who are either immigrants or marginalized individuals is a narrow but necessary one. Nochimson argues that key gangster films present immigrant protagonists who "manifest a wayward, tenacious desire to fight into the heart of the ever-beckoning, ever-elusive materialist social structure" (7). Ultimately, *Dying to Belong* is a welcome contemporary approach to a genre which crosses continents, giving a global dimension to the relationship between immigration and gangster fiction. This desire to belong sets the protagonists Nochimson focuses on apart from other gangster models such as John Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde, and Ma Barker, all of whom who are essentially rebelling against the social structure. The flashing Cook's Tour sign that is seen from Tony Camonte's window in *Scarface* (1932), beckoning to onlookers that "The World Is Yours," has often been read as a symbol of the gangster's lust for power. But it is also a metaphor of the outsiders desire for assimilation into another culture, an acceptance that is quite often an impossibility for the imperiled immigrant gangster who is quite literally "dying to belong." © 2009 Ronald Wilson

RONALD WILSON teaches in the Department of Theatre and Film at the University of Kansas.

BOOK DATA Martha P. Nochimson, *Dying to Belong: Gangster Movies in Hollywood and Hong Kong.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. $55.00 cloth; $29.95 paper. 304 pages.

CHARLES MUSSER

Seven Up! by Stella Bruzzi

Stella Bruzzi writes on the (to date) seven-part, septennial television series that began with *Seven Up!* (1964) and has had its latest installment with *49 Up* (2005). Michael Apted has provided the crucial continuity behind the camera, having been a researcher on the first program and the producer–director on subsequent installments. This longitudinal study of fourteen Britons who were seven years old in 1964 has become a renowned documentary achievement that has been widely imitated around the world (e.g. Japan, Russia, South Africa, the United States). Bruzzi provides an illuminating account of "The Up Series" (as it is known in the U.S.), structured and constrained by the format of these always-useful BFI pocketbook studies. Having gathered an array of helpful materials (notably interviews with participants in front of and behind the camera), she has mobilized her formidable knowledge of documentary with compelling results.

As Bruzzi points out, "The Up Series" was originally conceived by a Canadian (Paul Almond) and an Australian (Tim Hewat), who provided a critical, outsiders' perspective on the British class system as it was examined in the first program. (Almond directed while Hewat acted in an executive capacity at the "World in Action" series for Granada Television, where the programs were produced and televised.) One might argue that Apted himself has continued to provide the perspective of an Anglo-American outsider, having been based in the U.S. for many years. Moreover, one of the fourteen participants (Nick Hitchon) moved to the U.S. while another (Paul Kligerman) settled in Australia. What is worth noting then is that the series itself (as opposed to its spinoffs) has been shown almost exclusively in the Anglo-American world in which it is imbricated: the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. Despite language continuities, it has not been shown commercially in India. Indeed, the series has been packaged solely for DVD distribution by a U.S. company (First Run Features). Although this boxed set is widely available in the U.K., the series remains unavailable with German, French, or other foreign-language subtitles.

Bruzzi's study has three sustained sections: a production history, an analysis of the series' place in the history of British documentary, and a textual analysis. All three chapters are first-rate and perhaps particularly useful for an American reader. To foster a dialogue about her study and this series, I will suggest opportunities for furthering our understanding

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in each area. First, the production of "The Up Series" DVD (from which Bruzzi works) as well as other formats and their release patterns should be part of this production history. Although this book is part of the TV Classics series, television is only one of the various "screens" on which many of the individual programs were shown. The last four installments were screened in film festivals and had theatrical releases, followed by videotape and then DVD distribution. This broadening of exhibition outlets was as important as the structural, character-driven changes in the later programs' internal organization, which also began with *28 Up*. Indeed, they seem profoundly interrelated. Nor were these individual documentary programs always the same across formats. Unlike the TV broadcasts, the theatrical versions were not divided into two sections to be shown on successive nights. While Simon appears in the theatrical version of *35 Up*, his section was removed from the DVD release (and perhaps also from the television version?). Moreover, the version of *Seven Up!* on the DVD set has been re-edited to eliminate many of the "children" who were not followed in subsequent installments (or so it would appear). In this respect, the version used for the DVD set was not what was seen on TV at all. We might have counted on Bruzzi to make a careful assessment and comparison between the two (or explain why such a comparison was not possible). In short, Bruzzi does not pursue the history of variant prints and viewing formats, nor the differing responses they generated. It was the interplay of these different versions and their venues that transformed the series into the phenomenon that demands treatments such as Bruzzi's study.

Bruzzi's analysis of the place of "The Up Series" in British documentary history is particularly illuminating. What becomes obvious from this section is that American scholars possess only a partial understanding of this history—and vice versa for our British counterparts. We share a knowledge of filmmakers such as Nick Broomfield and Apted, who move between the U.S. and the U.K.—and are fixtures on the international film festival circuit. However our nation-based histories differ significantly. For example, the move toward an observational style, which Bruzzi sees as a trend in British documentaries of the 1980s, would not apply to the American scene, where observational and/or cinema-verité documentary was undergoing a general critique. We all need to be more cognizant of such differences—Bruzzi included.

Bruzzi's consideration of politics in "The Up Series" focuses on issues of class and gender—foregrounding what she sees as the series' growing humanism and the ways that its politics come to be revealed through character. She notes the series' underlying middle-class assumptions, though greater light could have been thrown on this subject by detailing Apted's own family background and personal history. The participants in front of Apted's camera are subjected to much greater personal scrutiny than the filmmaker himself—not only in the series but in Bruzzi's study. One important topic that Bruzzi fails to engage in any depth is race. To be sure, interracial interactions—excepting Bruce's postcolonial *noblesse oblige*, which he has fully abandoned by *49 Up*—are virtually absent in "The Up Series." But Simon, who is black and biracial, is barely mentioned in this book, further emphasizing the extent to which the series is increasingly unrepresentative of the actual social diversity of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Britain. Intentionally or not, the series projects a certain persistence of white, heterosexual normativity that many in the U.K. as well as Britain's former colonies have found quietly reassuring, perhaps nostalgic, in the face of real social and cultural changes. © 2009 Charles Musser

JOHNS HOPKINS
QUARTER PAGE

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BOOK DATA Stella Bruzzi, *Seven Up!* London: BFI Publishing, 2007. $20.95 paper. 160 pages.

FROM THE OTHER SHORE

On page 103 of his admirable survey, *Making Waves*, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith quotes a distinction drawn by the perpetually underestimated Jacques Rivette: "There are films which . . . have a beginning, and an ending, which carry a story through from its initial premise until everything has been brought back into order, and there have been deaths, marriage or a revelation; there is Hawks, Hitchcock, Murnau, Ray, Griffith. And there are films quite unlike this, which recede into time like rivers into the sea; and which offer us only the most banal of closing images: rivers flowing, crowds, armies, shadows passing, curtains falling in perpetuity, a girl dancing to the end of time; there is Renoir and Rossellini."

As Nowell-Smith deftly and immediately points out, while in 1955, when Rivette wrote these rather wonderful words, "it would be hard to think of more than a handful of names to put alongside those of Renoir and Rossellini," by the end of the 1960s "there were many filmmakers who could be put on that side of the divide, among them Rivette himself" (103). And *this* is a measure of the importance of the 1960s, when (for all the talk of "youthful exuberance" and the like) the art of film came of age. Its coming-of-age was not uniform. Nowell-Smith proceeds sensibly, country by country, which enables him to take due account of anomalies like Italy, which had no "new wave" and needed none—even if he is more lenient, or perhaps more generous, toward the British "new wave" (if this is what it was) than I would be (see my review of John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, *Film Quarterly*, spring 1989). All the same, anyone in the present day who is looking back at the 1960s and wondering what the fuss was all about would do well to ponder Rivette's words and Nowell-Smith's fine new book alike.

If Mark Harris's *Pictures at a Revolution* shows (to some extent despite itself) that the Hollywood of the 1960s continued to belong, fairly and squarely, on the nether side of Rivette's divide, the new European cinemas in Nowell-Smith's account were by contrast set up "in opposition to . . . the 'false perfection' of the studio film," as epitomized by Hollywood, which was seen as the purveyor of "a fundamentally inexplicit cinema . . . in which the marks of enunciation are suppressed and naturalized and stories are told which appear to be telling themselves" (3). (These are of course the protocols of nineteenth-century novels before writers began to question, then subvert, them.) The new European cinemas by contrast were, quite to the contrary, "developed from a position which the audience can locate and, if necessary, challenge . . . [I]n the new cinemas, the film unrolling in the spectator's presence represented not a substitute reality but an alternative take on what reality might be" (5).

Audiences were receptive. *The Lovers* (1958), *The 400 Blows*, *The Cousins*, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (all 1959), and *Breathless* (1960), were marked box-office successes in France and elsewhere; more generally, the decade witnessed the "emergence of an international audience that actually sought out artistically challenging films" (23)—just as Hollywood, forever sensitive to the "bottom line," "could no longer rely on exports to Europe as a stable source of income" (21). Consequently, "the international art film became increasingly attractive to major releasing companies as a business proposition and more and more filmmakers were tempted into the high-budget international arena. MGM, Fox, Warner Bros., and United Artists stepped up their investments in films by prestigious European, and especially Italian, directors" 215). "Provided the film had an English-language soundtrack"—a big proviso: see my review of Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour's *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film*, *Film Quarterly*, summer 2007—"it could be released by a US studio all over the world . . . The distance from the local worlds of *Les Quatre cent coups*, *Fists in the Pockets*, *Konkurs*, or *Black God, White Devil* was enormous" (216).

The distance separating these films and others like them from Hollywood's own, homegrown "product" was however more enormous still. The world of *Making Waves* is one where "Europe led, the rest of the world followed, and the USA looked on" (14), and where "there can be no doubt" about "the traumatic character of 1968" (13). Harris's *Pictures at a Revolution*, which deals with the histories of the five nominees for best picture at the 1968 Academy Awards, indicates that the *annus mirabilis* in question had a rather different signification in Hollywood. By 1970, the documentaries *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* and Kathleen Cleaver's cameo appearance in *Zabriskie Point* (one of three Antonioni films shot in English) were, in Nowell-Smith's words, "just about all that commercially released films showed the American public of the cultural revolution taking place under their noses" (51).

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These are sobering, even alarming words. They indicate the sense in which the very title of Harris's book (presumably a play on Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, but an unfortunate one all the same) could not be more misleading or off-base. Hollywood's imperviousness to the challenges thrown down by the new European cinemas did not stop short of imperviousness to what was going on in its own society—where the "cultural revolution taking place" was not just "cultural" to begin with. It was also more directly political than elsewhere, thanks to the draft, the Vietnam War, and the absence, this time around, of any "coalition of the billing," of any mercenary "allies" that would help the U.S. fight it. One would never guess any of this from Harris's account of the 1960s. It may be, as Nowell-Smith says, that "Hollywood was due for a generational change" (22) by the end of the decade; Harris, without intending to do so, casts doubt on how profound any such change might have been. The "revolution" of his title stopped well short of the inmates' taking over the asylum; the 1960s was a decade when the old world manifestly did not step in to redress the imbalance of the new. It was never asked to do so. The European new waves lapped up against the beachhead, then duly receded; and "the movie brats," *pace* Peter Biskind, were not on the brink of "taking over" Hollywood. Hollywood, once it had regrouped, proved only too capable of taking over them.

If, at the 1968 Academy Awards, "the rule book appeared to have been tossed out," as Harris puts it (3), this was so only to those who thought they'd written it, and hadn't deigned to notice that Godard, Pasolini et al. had redone its very grammar. What Harris means is that of the five nominees for best picture in 1968, "*The Graduate* had been turned down by every major studio and financed independently. *Bonnie and Clyde* had been financed by Warner Bros. but loathed by Jack Warner . . . *In the Heat of the Night* was made because . . . [it] could be produced so cheaply that it would never have to play in the South . . . and might still break even. *Guess Who's Coming for Dinner* was green-lighted only because Columbia . . . owed its producer-director, Stanley Kramer, a movie." (Kramer—much to his own chagrin—was still Hollywood's idea of a maverick, the blacklisted having been abandoned to their fate.) The only non-anomaly in the roster was *Doctor Doolittle*, which "cost more than twice as much as the other four combined" (2) and which—this comes as somewhat of a relief—flopped. Harris's account of what went wrong with the production of *Doctor Doolittle*—*everything* went wrong with the production of *Doctor Doolittle*, to the point when it was said of Rex Harrison that "the giraffe stepped on his cock" (239)—makes hilarious (and oddly satisfying) reading, and alone is worth the price of *Pictures at a Revolution*.

1968 marked "the first time since 1962 that all five Best Picture nominees were homegrown and . . . the strongest showing for [U.S.] actors in a decade" (401). Besides, *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* were not insignificant accomplishments. Even so, "the old Hollywood didn't disappear; it simply reinvented itself" (418)—itself and not much else. The distance between "a world that had just made *The Sound of Music* [which Christopher Plummer called 'the S-M movie'] the highest grossing film in history," and the world of new European cinema surveyed by Nowell-Smith—which is, finally, Rivette's great divide—is shown rather well by these two books. Each world has the book appropriate to it: Nowell-Smith's is a measured and aesthetically informed account of one of them, Mark Harris's a breezily written and at times breathless account of the other—a Hollywood "industry book" that displays the insider knowingness that often characterizes Hollywood "industry books," and which also resorts at times to the kind of "in-six-months-Spencer-Tracy-was-to-be-dead" prolepsis in which so many "industry books" tend to indulge themselves. "We're very grateful to all of you out there," said Joel Coen at the 2008 Academy awards, "for letting us continue to play in our corner of the sandbox." But sand is where heads get buried, as Harris shows. He reminds us, as though we needed reminding, that Hollywood is also a very sentimental sandbox—which is why Polo Lounge cynics flourish there too. Harris is no cynic, but his subject—a well-worn subject, in the end—is Hollywood's preference for the price of everything over the value of anything.

Reading *Pictures at a Revolution*, which cross-cuts rapidly and D. W. Griffith-style among the various narratives and chase sequences that went into the production histories of each of the five films he discusses, I was reminded of Sergei Eisenstein's words about Griffith (and about so much more than Griffith): "To understand Griffith, one must visualize an America made up of more than visions of speeding automobiles, streamlined trains, racing ticker tape, inexorable conveyor-belts. One is obliged to comprehend this second side of America as well—America the traditional, the patriarchal, the provincial." Tiker tape and trains are easily substituted for; "the traditional, the patriarchal, the provincial," by contrast, may yet take a while to dislodge.

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BOOK DATA Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s*. New York: Continuum, 2008. $95.00 cloth; $21.95 paper. 240 pages.

Mark Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of the New Hollywood*. New York: Penguin, 2008. $27.95 cloth; $17.00 paper. 496 pages.